2025 new bikes: the 13 models that matter

Experts' choice: the sportsbikes, tourers, retros & adventurers that'll rock next year

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[Adventure Special]

Filthy rich

£20k **MV Agusta** Enduro Veloce takes on the Peaks

ANALYSIS

20 years on top

How and why adventurers rule

EASY, RIGHT?

Comedy in Wales

We fall off (a lot) in the BMW GS Trophy
+ R1300GSA tested

RETROTASTIC

Scrambler 1200's Corsican caper

Island-hopping joy on **Triumph's** brilliant old-school adventurer

GROUP TEST

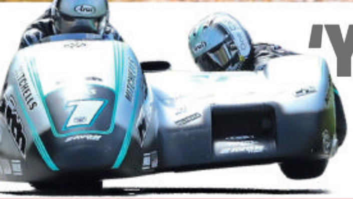
Proper naked sportsbikes

Triumph Street Triple 765 R takes on new Yamaha MT-09 and KTM 990 Duke

18 pages of

KNOW HOW

Living with the BMW F900GS
Classic racing with Team Bike
Tip-top kit for fussy teens
Ace adventure tyres



'You scrap with the thing – it wants to bite you...'

TT lunacy with sidecar heroes the Birchalls

10 acres of bouncy bits

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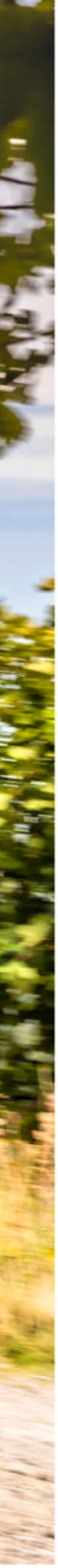

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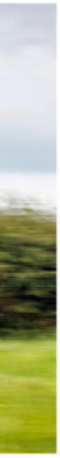

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Hello

Best-selling bike of 2025? Don't bet against it...

PIC: HONDA

Here's a plucky statement to start us off: motorcycling in the UK has never been more affordable or finer value. No, I haven't been drinking (6pm rule on a school day).

Yes, I know the cost of living seems to rise daily. The bar staff in our local roll their eyes every time I pay for a pint with carefully saved loose change, and my teens chunter at squirting Cheery Shopper ketchup on their dinner, not Heinz (I'm not yet drying and reusing tea bags). But in a world of soaring prices, biking really is bucking the trend.

It's highlighted several times this month. There's the Triumph Street Triple R in our group test (page 56), a cutting-edge 118bhp sporty naked with full adjustability and all the toys for £10k. Most reasonable. There's the Suzuki GSX-8R (p102), which is £8999 – exactly what a GSX-R750 cost over 25 years ago. But what really drills it home are the 2025 models from the recent EICMA show.

Honda have a new 150bhp supernaked for under £9k – an eye-opening £2650 less than the bike it replaces. The new Triumph Tiger Sport 800 mixes sportsbike excitement with usability and full electronics for over a grand less than a base Tiger 900. Even Ducati are at it: their new Streetfighter and Panigale are both over £2000 cheaper than predecessors.

We've analysed, studied, compared and argued over all of next year's new models to bring you the *Bike* choice in each category. Temptation begins on page 10.

Oh, and more joy turned up as we were about to go to press. Honda's new GB350S is a classy retro with just-so style and lashings of old-school Honda charm. It costs £3949. Even I can afford that. They'll shift oodles.

Enjoy the issue.

Mike Armitage
Editor

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Team Bike

This magazine is made by the most talented team of bike journalists, writers and photographers in the universe. Here's what they've been doing this month.

V4 Victory
Tech

1

Jamie Turner

He started his career at Norton, worked for Cosworth and Lotus Engineering, and is a professor of engines. Knows his stuff – and knows why MotoGP is wall-to-wall V4s.

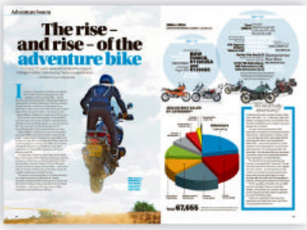
Tech, page 28

2

Martin Fitz-Gibbons

Inquisitive ex-*Bike* road tester loves adventure bikes and owns an MV. His test of the new Enduro Veloce in the Peaks is informed, eye-opening and a great read.

High class, page 36



3

Phil West

A full-time bike journo since 1847, Phil was at the centre of the adventure boom. He digs into why it happened, how it's affected motorcycling, and whether it'll last.

Rise of adventure, page 44

HOW HARD CAN IT BE?

4

John Westlake

Take one confident but largely inexperienced trail rider, sit them on an R1300GS, and launch them into the Welsh greenery. Laugh-out-loud brilliant.

GS Trophy, page 68

Treasure
island

5

Simon Weir

Bike's assistant ed in a previous life, Simon is an authority on ace rides and destinations. He trundles to overlooked Corsica on the underrated new Triumph Scrambler 1200.

Treasure island, page 82

Out & about
Mother, is that you?
CST

6

Mike Armitage

Is the GSX-8R the 'Gixer' for the modern world? Rather then merely speculate, the editor heads to Cadwell for side-by-side comparison. Nearly gets his knee down.

Out & about, page 102

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13 BIKES THAT REALLY MATTER THIS MONTH

THERE'S AN SP, TOO

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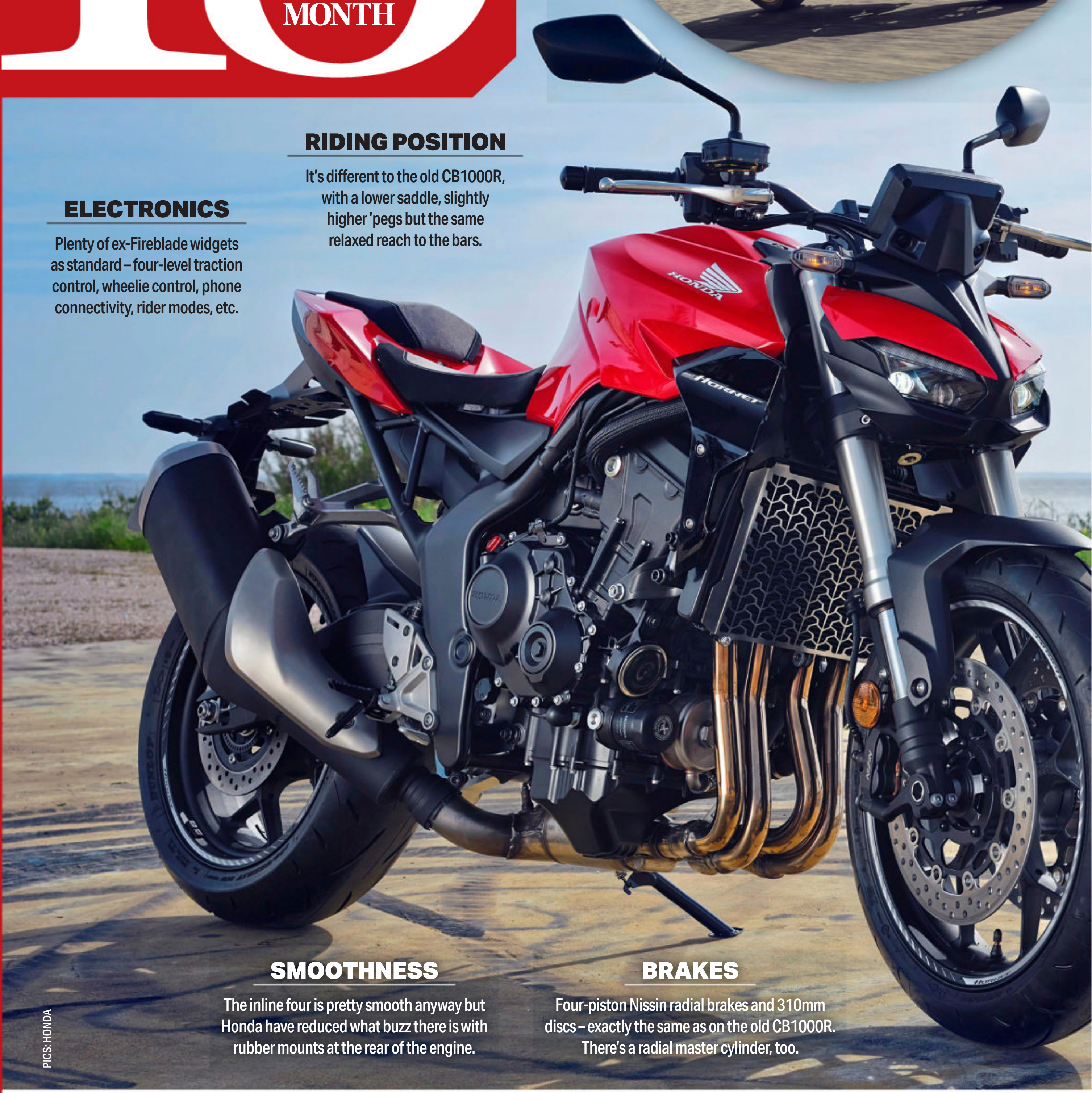

RIDING POSITION

It's different to the old CB1000R, with a lower saddle, slightly higher 'pegs but the same relaxed reach to the bars.

ELECTRONICS

Plenty of ex-Fireblade widgets as standard – four-level traction control, wheelie control, phone connectivity, rider modes, etc.

SMOOTHNESS

The inline four is pretty smooth anyway but Honda have reduced what buzz there is with rubber mounts at the rear of the engine.

BRAKES

Four-piston Nissin radial brakes and 310mm discs – exactly the same as on the old CB1000R. There's a radial master cylinder, too.

PICS: HONDA

[BIKE'S PICK: VALUE]

Big value big Hornet

New **Honda CB1000** continues the 750 Hornet's good value crusade, with 150bhp and a £8999 price tag

In 2023, the CB750 Hornet shocked its middleweight rivals by being fast, fun and top value. It quickly became Europe's best-selling naked. Honda are now trying to pull the same trick in the 1000cc sector with this, the CB1000 Hornet. And the signs are good, with a 150bhp motor, loads of electronic rider aids and premium Showa suspension for £8999.

As usual with Hornets, this concoction isn't a clean-sheet design – the new bike is essentially a detuned 2017 Fireblade engine with all its associated electronics plonked into a new chassis sprinkled with parts from the outgoing CB1000R (the luxurious 'Neo Sports Cafe' naked powered by the 2006 Fireblade engine).

New camshafts and a reduced compression ratio tone down the Blade's loopy 189bhp top end and spread more torque lower down the rev range. Peak torque is 77 lb.ft at 9000rpm, compared to the Fireblade's 84 lb.ft at 11,000rpm. Because of the lower power, some of the engine components don't need to be as exotic – so the Fireblade's sodium-filled valves are replaced with steel ones and magnesium engine covers are replaced with aluminium. The gear ratios are lower for greater thrust at road speeds, with sixth left high 'to offer relaxed highway cruising', say Honda. A slipper clutch comes as standard.

The 2017 Fireblade was a huge upgrade on the previous version, primarily because Honda finally bit the bullet and introduced a swathe of electronic rider aids. The Hornet gets the lot, though some elements are thankfully pared down – there are now a usable four levels of traction control compared to the Blade's nine, for example.

The Hornet's three riding modes – Rain, Standard and Sport – give you pre-set levels of power, engine braking, traction control and wheelie control. As with the 2017 Blade, there are two customisable modes so you can try to improve on Mr Honda's settings.

From there on the Hornet diverges from the old Blade and is more influenced by the outgoing CB1000R. The dash is TFT rather than the Blade's olde worlde LCD, the lights are LED, and Honda's RoadSync app lets you run turn-by-turn navigation on the screen, controlled by new switchgear. The frame is more CB1000R than Blade, too. Instead of the sportsbike's aluminium beam, the Hornet has a cheaper, heavier, steel twin spar job, which Honda say is 70 per cent more torsionally rigid than the previous model's.

Honda were clearly happy with the old bike's handling though, as the Hornet's geometry and suspension is all but identical, with fully adjustable 41mm Showa Big Piston forks and a Showa rear shock. The wheelbase is exactly the same and rake and trail are only fractions out. No bad thing: the old CB handled well.

The killer difference is price. The old CB looked classy, rode well, and at £11,649 was reasonable value so sold in good numbers. But at under £9k, the new Hornet should set a new benchmark for value.

ENGINE

The start point was the 2017 Fireblade, which was tuned to spread torque lower down the rev range. Power is 150bhp – 9bhp up on the old CB1000R.

Accessories let you dial up the bling

> 'Honda's RoadSync app lets you run navigation on the new TFT screen'

SUSPENSION

Posher than the 660's, with fully adjustable Showa forks and a shock with a remote preload adjuster and rebound adjustment.

ENGINE

Triumph say it's all new, but the bore is identical to the Street Triple 765's – the 800's extra capacity coming from a longer stroke. Power is 113bhp – 23bhp up on the Tiger Sport 660.

[BIKE'S PICK: ALL-ROUNDER]

Perfect co

Triumph blend the fizz of a Street Triple 765 with the all-day practicality of their Tiger Sport 660. Result: the new **Tiger Sport 800**

Cramming a big-bike engine into a small-bike chassis isn't a new trick, but it tends to work rather well (prime example: 1992 Honda FireBlade). So we have high hopes for the new Triumph Tiger Sport 800.

It has a longer-stroke Street Triple 765 engine squeezed into the chassis of the excellent Tiger Sport 660. So that's 113bhp rather than the 660's 80bhp, 30 per cent more torque and – hopefully – similarly playful handling. Plus the 660's comfy riding position.

'It's essentially a completely new engine,' says Triumph's product manager Steve Sargent. 'Though it does share some hardware with the 765. But we've boosted the midrange, taking the excitement and top end of the Street Triple and given it the midrange grunt of a 900.

'There's no T-plane crank because we didn't think it was the best format for this bike – the Tiger Sport 800 is a road bike [Triumph say the T-plane crank improves feel off-road].'

The clever bit has been fitting the engine into the 660 chassis, which remains unchanged apart from a section of the upper frame rails that had to go round the 800's three throttle bodies (the 660 only has one). 'We tried to keep the engine as compact and light as we could,' says Triumph's chief engineer Stuart Wood. 'The engine is no bigger than the 660's – all the dimension changes are internal, so the pistons, con rods, crank, balancer, gearbox, cylinder head, valves, throttle bodies… everything is different to the 660. It's all done to get that nice combination of top-end performance and midrange punch.'

Although the frame and swingarm are all but identical to the 660, the suspension is upgraded, with fully adjustable 41mm Showa forks and a Showa rear shock with rebound adjustment.

Triumph say the Tiger 800's key rivals are the Yamaha Tracer 9 and BMW F900XR (see box, right), and claim the Tiger accelerates faster and has superior roll-on performance. But perhaps the new Tiger's greatest rivals are closer to home – there are, after all, Tiger 900 GTs already sitting in showrooms.

'The 800's suspension is geared for road riding,' argues Steve Sargent. 'With 17in wheels [the Tiger 900 GTs have 19in fronts],

PICS: TRIUMPH

CHASSIS

Frame and swingarm come from the Tiger Sport 660 thanks to the new engine being the same size as the 660, despite the extra 140cc.

ELECTRONICS

Three riding modes, quickshifter and cruise control as standard, plus cornering ABS and traction control.

Lacks full TFT bling but still good

mbo?

Michelin Road 5 tyres and road-focused suspension settings, it's operating in a different area to the 900 Tigers.'

The 900s are also better equipped. The 800 has plenty of toys – three riding modes (Sport, Road, and Rain), switchable traction control, quickshifter, cruise control and cornering ABS – but the dash is from the 660, which means it's half LCD. Fine, but not as flash as the 900's TFT.

But there again, the 800 is more powerful and cheaper. At £10,995, the Tiger Sport 800 undercuts the nearest 900 by £1200. Watch this space for the first tests. The Tiger Sport 800 will be in showrooms by March 2025.

New DRLs make us think of Transformers

Pick a fun, friendly, upright all-rounder

	Tiger Sport 800	Tiger 900 GT	Yam Tracer 9	BMW F900XR
» Price	£10,995	£12,195	£11,116	£10,350
» Power	113bhp	107bhp	117bhp	103bhp
» Torque	61 lb.ft	66 lb.ft	69 lb.ft	68 lb.ft
» Weight	214kg	219kg	219kg	219kg

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[BIKE'S PICK: HOOLIGAN]

Connoisseur's headcase

New **BMW S1000R** gives irrelevant wings a miss and concentrates on the important stuff – more power, slicker ride and better looks

The most obvious change from the outside

We've nothing against wings – we like them on aeroplanes – but they're a daft addition to road bikes. Adding 10kg of downforce to the front end at 150mph is as useful to most of us as a 15th level of slide control. So respect to BMW for resisting the temptation to plaster the new S1000R with sticky-out bits and focusing instead on what's actually important: how it rides.

So, for example, it has got a shorter final drive ratio, a slicker quickshifter, and a new short-stroke throttle that reduces the amount of effort required from your right wrist to go from pottering to prison – the old S1000R needed 72 degrees of twist, while the new model needs only 58 degrees.

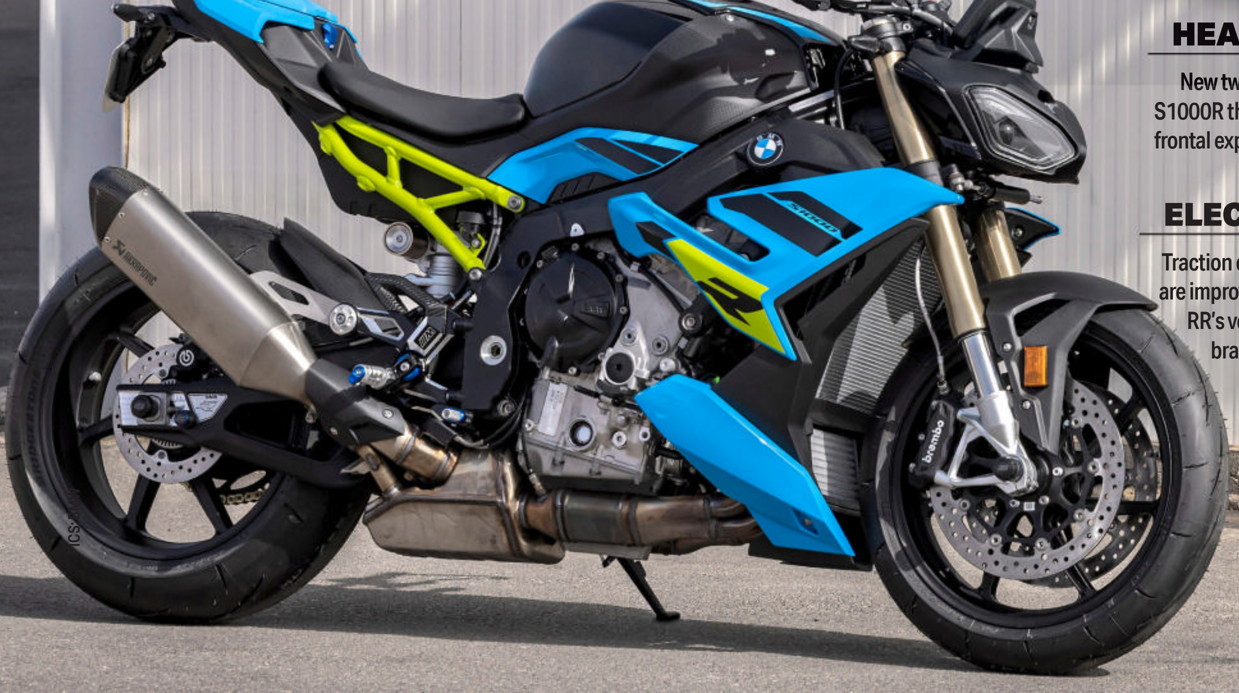
Other tweaks include the traction control, which nicks the latest algorithms from the M1000RR (see panel, right) to be even more accurate when metering out power. The new engine brake settings also come from the RR models – the system works in conjunction with the slipper clutch to ensure the rear wheel never hops about should you stamp down the 'box. In fact, it's clever enough to work even when there's not enough grip to engage the slipper clutch – in the wet, for example. If you go down a gear too many, the system predicts a rear wheel lock-up and momentarily opens the throttle valves to keep the rear wheel braking rather than sliding.

The S1000R's power increases from 165bhp to a not-entirely relevant 170bhp, but BMW say there's no change to the midrange. Peak torque remains at 84 lb.ft at 9250rpm.

As usual, there are a range of packs and optional extras. If the new bike is anything like the old one, the connoisseur's choice will be the Sport version, which comes with loads of go-faster electronic goodness plus heated grips and cruise control – it's £15,675. The standard bike will cost £13,760 when it arrives in March 2025.

Meanwhile in aero-land...

The new M1000RR gets the biggest road bike wings yet, capable of adding 30kg of downforce at 186mph and – by the look of them – curtailing your filtering abilities. There are a multitude of engine changes, taking peak power to 221bhp, and frame flex is changed, presumably to assist the WSB teams. The S1000RR gets similar wings but not the engine mods, so it stays at 207bhp. M1000RR prices start at £32,850, but tick all the boxes and you can easily hit £40,000. The S1000RR is £17,990 and available in January. You'll have to wait until April for the M.



ENGINE

Intake and mapping changes gain 5bhp, taking peak power to 170bhp. Peak torque from the non-ShiftCam motor stays at 84 lb.ft.

HEADLIGHTS

New twin LEDs give the S1000R the same hacked-off frontal expression as the RRs.

ELECTRONICS

Traction control electronics are improved, and it gets the RR's very trick engine braking system.

[**BIKE'S PICK: WHEELIES**]

Single, handsome, looking for fun...

Suzuki reintroduce the **DR-Z**. Could be the best-timed comeback of the year

Loiter next to a Peak District green lane and every group of gnarly mud-splattered trail riders that burbles past will contain a Suzuki DR-Z400S. The single-cylinder device nailed the dual-purpose thing. It was solid, dependable and a decent performer in mud and brambles, and far more bearable on tarmac than a bespoke puddle-jumper. There was a small-wheeled, big-fun DR-Z400SM supermoto version, too. Both were sadly discontinued yonks ago. But now they're back, as the new DR-Z4S and DR-Z4SM.

The ongoing passion for the old DR-Z has obviously influenced the decision (have you seen what battered old examples still fetch?), and so has the fact smaller-capacity singles are in demand. Just ask Royal Enfield, Honda and Triumph. And truth is the DR-Z never really went away – emissions stopped it coming here but both varieties have stayed in production for other markets (along with the DR650S, and the GSX-R750, and the M1800 Intruder...).

As before, it's a 398cc four-stroke single, but liberally spruced with a new twin-plug cylinder head and piston, fresh camshafts, titanium inlet valves, and fuel injection with a 40mm throttle replacing the vintage 36mm carburettor.

Peak output drops a smidge to 37bhp at 8000rpm and 27 grunts at 6500rpm, but there's more clout at low revs and a wider spread of power. Phew. You get three riding modes, adjustable traction control (include a gravel setting) and switchable ABS.

The old backbone steel frame is gone, replaced with a new perimeter one with a detachable alloy subframe. Suspension has adjustable rebound and compression damping front and rear. The DR-Z4S gets a rock-swallowing 280mm of front wheel travel and 296mm out back, a vast 300mm of ground clearance, and proper off-road wheel sizes. The SM's bouncy bits are shorter but still extremely ample with 260mm fore and 277mm aft, controlling 17in wheels with gloopy Dunlop tyres. Its chassis set-up and the eager single should be just the job for sneaky back-lane wheelies...

Styling is new, inspired by the RM-Z off-roaders. The trailie S comes in yellow (the one to get) or grey, while the SM is sort-of grey-ish blue or sharp white with blue rims. We love a coloured rim.

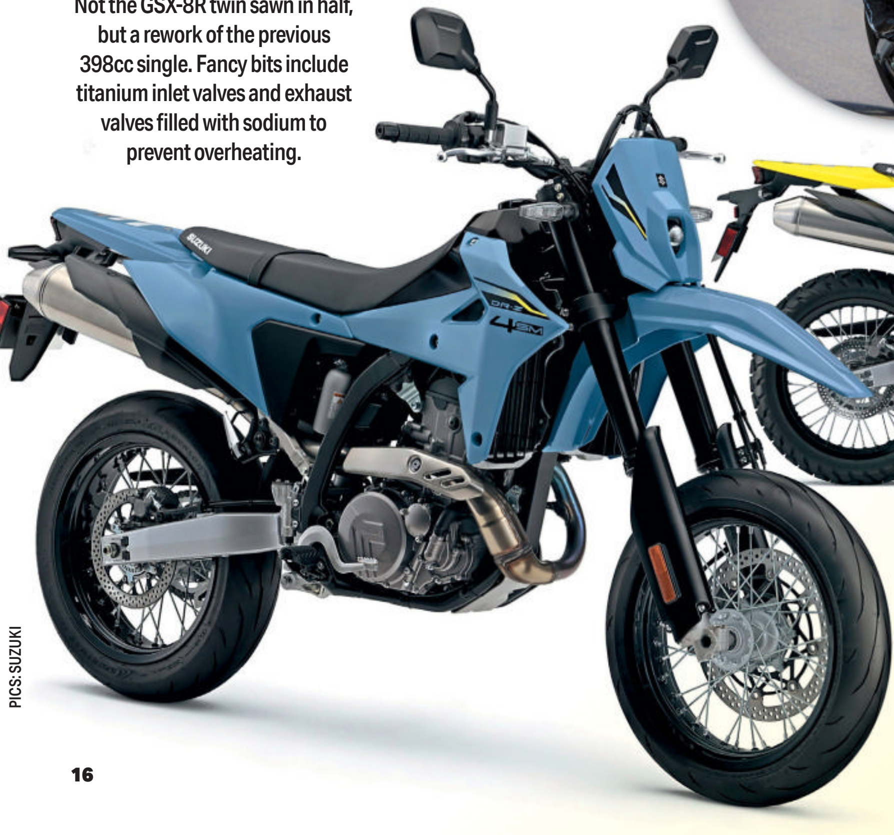
The old DR-Z400SM was a little niche but undeniably a hoot, while the DR-Z400S was durable, easy to ride, fun, and a doddle to work on. Keeping all these pleasing attributes and wrapping them with modernity gives the new pair genuine desirability in today's changing market – the DR-Z4S could be the go-to bike for those after a proper adventure tool. If the price is right – it won't be announced until the new year.

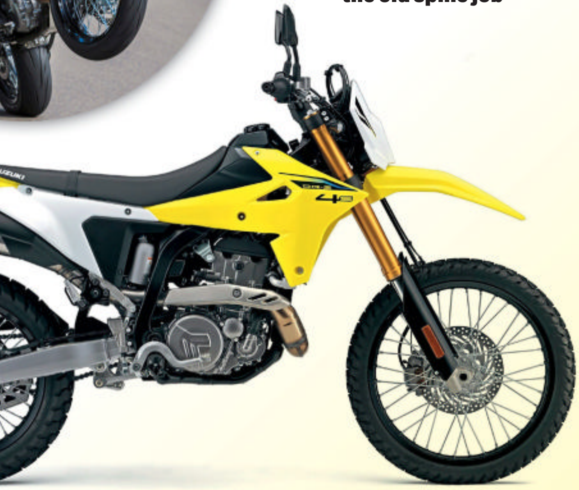
Silly, yes, but also much fun

New perimeter frame replaces the old spine job

REFRESHED THRUST

Not the GSX-8R twin sawn in half, but a rework of the previous 398cc single. Fancy bits include titanium inlet valves and exhaust valves filled with sodium to prevent overheating.





ONE BIKE, TWO ROLES

The DR-Z4SM has 17in wheels with track-ready Dunlop Sportmax Q5A tyres. On the DR-Z4S it's a 21in front, 18in rear, and IRC's dual-purpose GP-410.

MEASURED TECH

Modes, traction control, turn-off-able ABS, yes. But it's an old-style LCD display, not fancy-pants TFT.

PICS: SUZUKI

ZEROFIT

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1. It's five times warmer than a standard baselayer

That is quite a claim, but it's a fact. Independently tested at the iconic Boken Institute in Osaka, the Heatrub Ultimate baselayer recorded a Heat Retention Rating of 0.78; a standard baselayer would have a rating of between 0.1 to 0.14. And for reference, a jumper would typically have a rating of 0.3. The Ultimate performs best in a temperature range of -10º Celsius thru 10º Celsius – so even in the coldest of conditions and most biting of winds, you'll still be nicely heated.

2. Instant warmth the moment you put it on

A standard baselayer traps body heat between your skin and the material, so it takes a little time before you feel the benefits. With Zerofit, five separate fabrics, along with a patented knitting process, create instant warmth as soon as you pull it on. And, because of the construction of the garment, this heat is retained for the duration of your time on the bike, making it an essential piece of kit this winter.

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Innovative 'Heat Threads' positioned on the inside of the garment gently rub against your skin and are activated upon even the smallest of movements, creating positive warmth across your body. We also make Heatrub Ultimate Leggings, Heatrub Ultimate Socks (Standard and Long options) and a Heatrub Ultimate Neckwarmer that are made from the same material and work in exactly the same way, so you can have top-to-toe warmth with Zerofit.

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The Ultimate is the ideal product for bikers who hate traditional tight baselayers. Over the years, you may well have 'layered up' in order to combat the effects of cold weather. This is where we are changing the game. The Heatrub Ultimate is so good at keeping you warm, you won't need multiple additional layers. And the unique fabric mix means it doesn't need to rely on compression to keep you warm, making it super comfortable too.

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Instant warmth the moment you put it on
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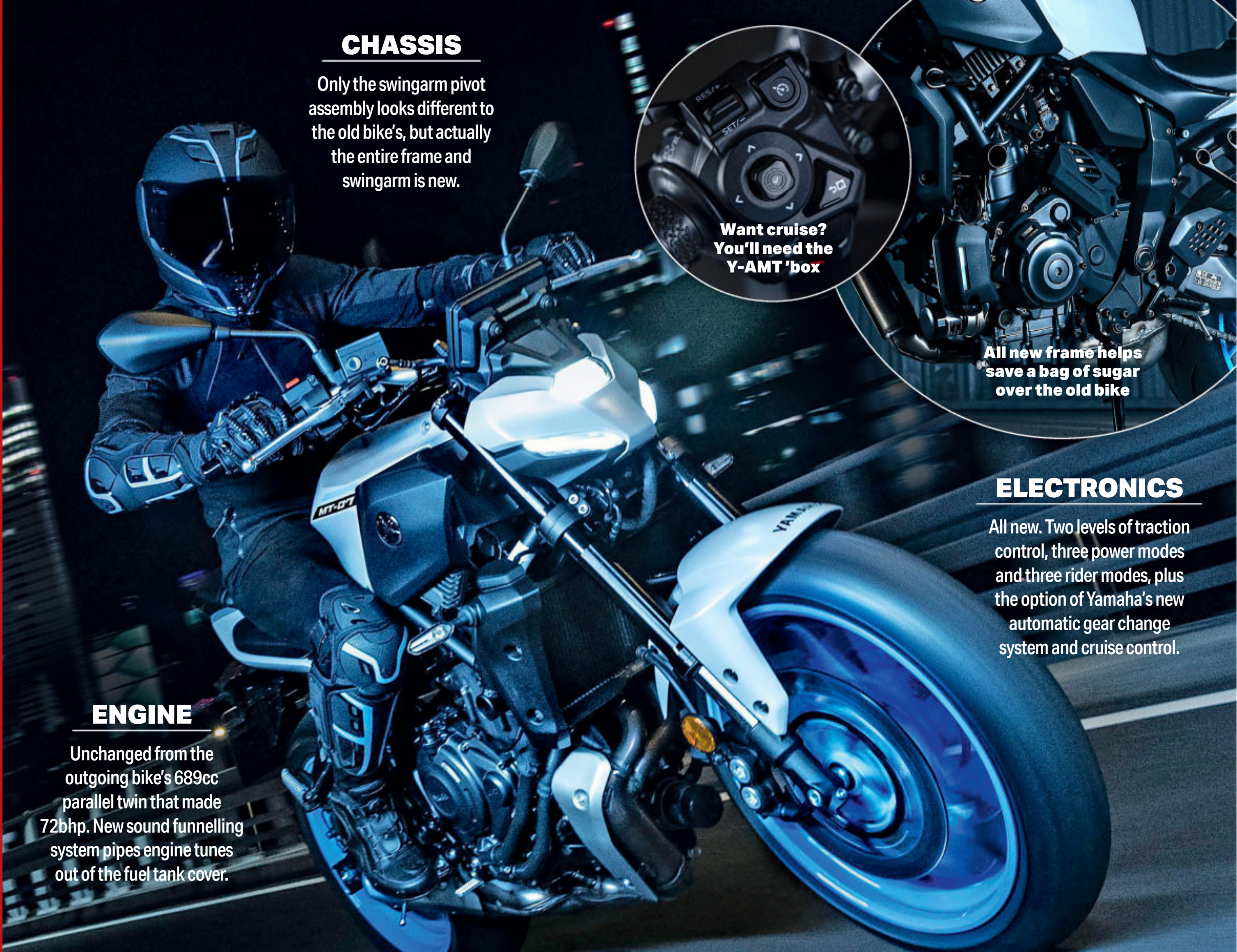

CHASSIS

Only the swingarm pivot assembly looks different to the old bike's, but actually the entire frame and swingarm is new.

Want cruise? You'll need the Y-AMT 'box

All new frame helps save a bag of sugar over the old bike

ELECTRONICS

All new. Two levels of traction control, three power modes and three rider modes, plus the option of Yamaha's new automatic gear change system and cruise control.

ENGINE

Unchanged from the outgoing bike's 689cc parallel twin that made 72bhp. New sound funnelling system pipes engine tunes out of the fuel tank cover.

[BIKE'S PICK: ROADSTER]

MT-07 gets rorty

2025 Yamaha MT-07 comes with new suspension, electronics, brakes… and a system to make it sound fruity

Yamaha's MT-07 is so good that it hasn't required much fettling since its 2014 launch to keep it near the top of sales charts. But with rivals such as the Triumph Trident 660 now making it look dated, Yamaha have finally given their perky middleweight a comprehensive overhaul. Improvements are concentrated on two areas: electronics and handling – the 689cc parallel-twin is largely unchanged apart from a sound amplification system, which we'll get to later.

The outgoing MT-07 didn't have a ride-by-wire throttle, and consequently couldn't have any of the electronic rider aids buyers are coming to expect. The new one fixes that, so you get three rider modes (Street, Sport and Customisable), three power modes, two levels of traction control and the options for cruise control and a quickshifter. There's also a Y-AMT version which comes with Yamaha's excellent new automatic transmission (see test in *Bike*, December 2024).

There are plenty of hardware changes, too. While it looks similar to the old bike's, the new frame is 13 per cent more rigid to improve handling and there's a new, lighter swingarm that Yamaha say improves stability. New 41mm inverted forks (the old bike had conventional ones) give 'a more planted front end feeling alongside a more modern and premium look', according to Yamaha. That premium look is carried over to the front brakes, which now have radial calipers instead of the old conventional ones (which worked fine). The rear shock stays the same, which a cynic might suggest is because you can't see it as easily.

The downsides to all the new kit and gizmos are usually weight and price. As *Bike* went to press, Yamaha hadn't revealed the latter, but the former has actually decreased – down from 184kg to 183kg. New spin-forged wheels save 500g, die-cast aluminium yokes save a few more, and the new minimalist bodywork shaves off 600g. Yamaha have even tweaked the air filter, chain and fuel cap to stop the overall weight from going up.

The engine, though, is unchanged aside from an 'acoustic amplifying system' that pipes the intake roar through four openings in the new fuel tank cover straight into the rider's mush. Yamaha say it's most noticeable coming out of low-speed corners. You can hear it in dealers from March 2025.

[BIKE'S PICK: ADVENTURE]

Moving the benchmark

Yamaha's Ténéré 700 underlines its place as the best mid-sized adventurist

Saunter into the local bike meet on next year's revised Ténéré and there probably won't be a stampede. The updates are subtle; Yamaha have been reserved and hardly done what you'd call night-and-day changes. And that's just fine. The 700 was already glorious, so they've just deepened its shine with an extra layer of gloss.

Yam have given the 689cc twin-cylinder adventurist the same ride-by-wire update as the MT-07 it shares its motor with (left). You get two riding modes and switchable traction control, along with the turn-off-able ABS. Fiddling with all the settings and trip info is done via new switchgear and on a colour TFT that's now 6.3in instead of 5in and comes with connectivity (of course). There are also gentle tweaks to the bodywork, new winkers, a one-piece seat, a slimmer clutch cover for more room for your flailing limbs, and other details.

The current Ténéré Explore model is renamed the Ténéré Low and has its seat 15mm closer to the ground. And the variant that was previously called the Extreme is renamed the Rally, with a 20mm taller ride, off-road-stylee high front mudguard, titanium footpegs, and a thick bash plate. Got all that? Splendid.

Yamaha will have announced prices at the NEC.

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YAMAHA

Ténéré is now ride-by-wire. Above: 'road book' TFT grows an inch

[BIKE'S PICK: TOURER]

Polished to perfection

Planning a long ride? We recommend taking the spankin' **Yamaha Tracer 9**

There was little wrong with Yamaha's flexible, adaptable and much-loved Tracer 9. But they've improved it anyway. The 890cc, 117bhp three-cylinder engine is unchanged, but the new three-bike range – made up of Tracer, GT, and GT+ models – gets updated bodywork, a tweaked riding position to improve the already fine comfort, and more room for pillions.

The up-spec and increasingly blingy GT and GT+ keep their semi-active suspension and electric screen, but now also feature super-high-tech cornering lights. These are proper clever. The lamp assembly contains a camera that tells the ECU about light levels from oncoming cars, street lights, dog walkers with silly head torches, etc. The ECU knows what lean angle the bike is at, so adjusts a matrix of LEDs to give the optimum light without dazzling anyone. Wow. The GT+ is also equipped with radar and comes with the full quota of electronic widgets and rider aids.

Yamaha's excellent automatic gearbox (Y-AMT) is optional on the base model and GT, and comes as standard on the GT+. Prices for all three will have been announced at Motorcycle Live.

[BIKE'S PICK: RETRO]

2025 NEW BIKE SPECIAL

Reassuringly simple

Shake paws with the **Bear 650** – the Royal Enfield with an odd name but straightforward appeal

Way back in 1960, the Big Bear Run in the deserts of California attracted 765 entrants. Big-name racers slogged it out in the ludicrous 150-mile event, including Triumph-supported legend Bud Ekins, but it was won by a spunky teenager called Eddie Mulder. He was riding a 499cc single-cylinder Royal Enfield Fury.

Fast Eddie's famous win – at 16 he was and still is the youngest ever victor in the epic race – is why this new bike is called the Bear 650. But ignore the strange choice of moniker. Ignore too all the promotional pictures of it being ridden by hip types in clobber worn by no one outside of California/Shoreditch. And instead get ready to make a beeline to a Royal Enfield dealer.

Turning their excellent and hugely popular Interceptor 650 into a scrambler might be mildly predictable, but the execution is cock on. Perched a tad higher and with an extra 10mm of ground clearance, the Bear has Himalayan-looking big piston upside-down forks but with more road-biased 130mm wheel travel, and twin shocks with 115mm of movement. Interceptor wheel sizes are 18in at both ends, but for scramblering the new bike has a 19in front and 17in rear. Wheelbase is up from 1398mm to 1460mm and there's a larger rear brake disc, too.

Clearly, then, this isn't a motocross bike. However, the desert sleds that tore around the US in the 1960s were generally simple, stripped-back roadsters with a few parts beefed up for romping across the scrub. And this means the Bear is convincing.

Those generally home-brewed sleds often kept the original low exhaust, which is why the new 650 doesn't have a high-level pipe. That, and the fact it means there's room for luggage and your passenger's legs won't get grilled. The two-into-one system saves a kilo (kerb weight is 216kg with the 13.6-litre tank 90 per cent full) and is responsible for the changes to the output of the air-cooled 648cc parallel twin. Maximum power stays at an A2-pleasing 47bhp but there's extra midrange thump and 3 lb.ft more outright torque, resulting in 42 lb.ft at 5150rpm.

All the retro-ness is balanced by the neat colour TFT 'Tripper' display, which has phone connectivity and supports Google Maps for navigation. The 650 also has a USB-C port and LED lights and all that gubbins.

There are loads of colour options, with prices starting at £6749 – a few hundred more than an Interceptor. Bikes are expected before the end of the year. Form a disorderly queue.

249
INT
BEAR 650

'Two four nine' scheme has Eddie's number

Modern front end, just-so stance, solid base. What's not to like?

DESERT READY

Forks and shocks are by Showa, and give the Bear more wheel travel front and rear plus additional ground clearance. The rear ABS can be turned off too, but don't get carried away – think beach blasts and light trails, not extreme enduro.

SAME... SORT OF

It's the chirpy but flexible 648cc twin used in the other 650s, but there's more low and midrange shunt and a boost in peak torque.

ROYAL ENFIELD

PICS: ROYAL ENFIELD

EASIER TO RIDE

Yes, there's lots of go-faster bits and tech. But the F3 Competizione also has a new assist and slipper clutch that requires 50 per cent less lever effort.

SHINY GOLD BITS

Suspension is Öhlins, with 43mm fully adjustable NIX30 forks and an equally tweakable TTX36 rear shock. There's also a 19-setting Öhlins steering damper.

Built for this (reaching-for-it elbow down not essential)

[BIKE'S PICK: EXOTICA]

What they do best

Expensive, exclusive and extremely 'ooh', the F3 Competizione is MV Agusta being as MV as possible

If you're going to do something, do it properly. 'Go big or go home' as they say. If you're going to a rock concert, get up the front and engage 'mosh' mode. Ordering a double half-pounder with bacon? Get the loaded chips rather than the salad. And if you're buying a sportsbike, make it as full-on racy as possible.

Yes, there's the matter of the asking price of 34,000 Euros, which is around £28,500. This small point aside, the new MV Agusta F3 Competizione is the full-bling sportsbike at its most alluring and high-spec. Presented as 'the world's finest and most thrilling supersport motorcycle ever crafted', it bristles with carbon fibre, exquisitely machined materials and the sort of components you find hanging off bikes in a race paddock.

And it weighs chuff-all. The Competizione is a whopping 14kg lighter than the regular (if an MV can ever be called thus) F3 RR that it's based on. Kilos are stripped away by using carbon fibre wheels, titanium engine covers, lithium-ion battery, super-posh and fully adjustable Öhlins suspension, carbon bodywork with in-built wings… oh, plus a model-specific titanium Akrapovic exhaust. It's not road legal, so you get a sensible silenced pipe included.

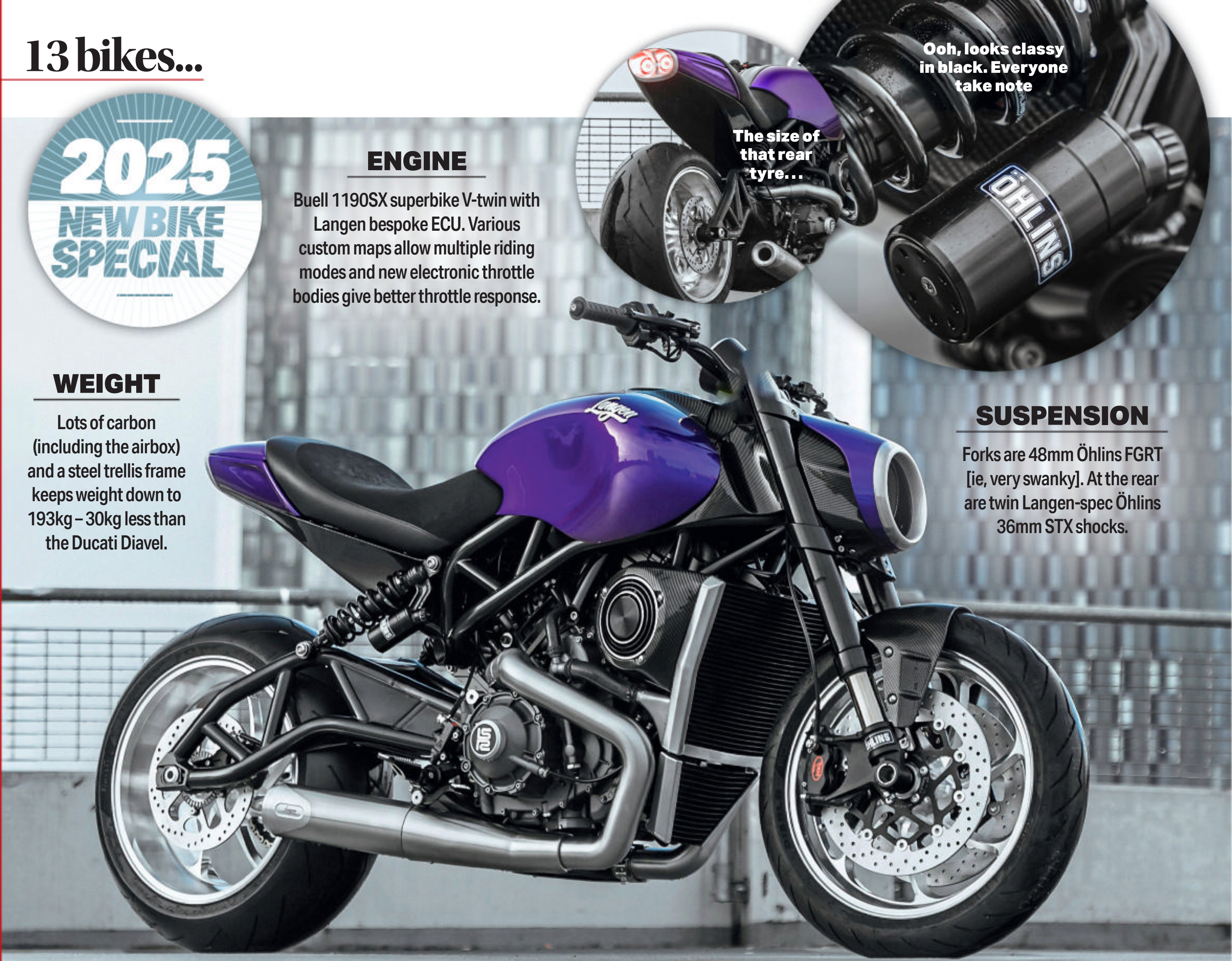
> 'Full-bling sportsbike at its most alluring and high-spec'

With the rowdy pipe fitted, MV say the F3 weighs 178kg in running order minus fuel – so that should be just over 190kg with the 16.5-litre tank brimmed. They also reckon the Akra' lets the 798cc inline-three engine make 158bhp at 13,500rpm, which, with the fancy electronics engaged – launch control and front-lift control – will see it scurry from 0-62mph in less than three seconds.

Tech-heads will also appreciate the four riding modes and the upgraded IMU (inertial measurement unit) that manages the eight-level traction control. There's cruise control too, for all the long motorway trips you'll obviously want to make.

MV will hand-make just 300 through the course of next year. Each will have a numbered plaque screwed to the fancy machined top yoke and a nice certificate for the mantelpiece.

PICS: MV AGUSTA



The size of that rear tyre...

Ooh, looks classy in black. Everyone take note

ENGINE

Buell 1190SX superbike V-twin with Langen bespoke ECU. Various custom maps allow multiple riding modes and new electronic throttle bodies give better throttle response.

WEIGHT

Lots of carbon (including the airbox) and a steel trellis frame keeps weight down to 193kg – 30kg less than the Ducati Diavel.

SUSPENSION

Forks are 48mm Öhlins FGRT [ie, very swanky]. At the rear are twin Langen-spec Öhlins 36mm STX shocks.

[BIKE'S PICK: ÜBER-CRUISER]

British Diavel nearly ready

New **Langen** 185bhp V-twin will line up against Ducati Diavel and Triumph's Rocket 3

These photos of Langen's Lightspeed super-cruiser show the 185bhp V-twin is close to launching. The chassis, engine, geometry and many details are in their final form. The remaining big challenge is the electronics package.

'The electronics are a step up for Langen,' says Langen founder Chris Ratcliffe. 'Obviously our team has worked with them before [several are ex-Triumph] but implementing our own ECU with traction control, anti-wheelie, launch control, etc is a challenge.

'It costs several hundred thousand [pounds] to develop an ECU, so we had to find one that had the right hardware, and then work with companies to develop the firmware and software.

'ABS in particular is a massive challenge. There are two premium companies – Bosch and Continental – and to work with them costs €150,000 just to use their components and do some testing.

'But we're now at the point of pressing the button on getting some production tooling, then we can build the pre-production bike and do high-mileage testing [of the electronics and engine] over winter.'

The engine is a 1190cc Rotax V-twin made for Buell's 1190SX supernaked. 'We talked to manufacturers in Europe and Japan and had a list of six potential engines,' says Chris. 'Luckily we ended up with the engine that was top of our list.'

Chris has ridden the prototype, which first appeared at the NEC show last year. 'Without the final mapping it's already good,' he says. 'It pulls from very low down in every gear, but because it's a superbike engine it revs out like a Ducati. We're going to make a few tweaks to bring some of the power from the top end down into the midrange – most riders will live at 3-4000rpm, so it needs to be fast there.

'The aim is to be the fastest thing away from the lights. With all the electronics, anyone should be able to wind the throttle on and launch. It's spitting flames at the moment, so we're still fine-tuning what we can get away with in terms of customers and the authorities...'

Langen are also working hard to reduce weight – the prototype is 193kg without fuel, making it 30kg lighter than Ducati's Diavel. 'The problem is that everything needs to be so lightweight and tightly packaged that there's nothing we can buy off the shelf,' says Chris. Besides the frame and swingarm, the wheels and even the switchgear and brake reservoirs will be made in-house.

'This will be our platform for years to come and we can sprinkle some low-volume gems into the range to complement the Lightspeed,' says Chris. 'The problem is trying to focus on one thing at a time...'

Limited to 185 units, the Lightspeed is expected to cost £44,000 and will be available late next year.

PICS: LANGEN

[BIKE'S PICK: SPORTS TOURER]

Like a nuclear armchair

KTM's already loopy **Super Duke GT** gets bigger, faster, cleverer… and comfier, too

You can get a quick feel for the new 1390 Super Duke GT with a few quotes from the press blurb. More muscle and aggression… more power… an exceptionally fast road bike with serious track ambitions… It reads like the promo guff for a head-down superbike, not an upright mile muncher, and is supported by pictures of professional hardman Jeremy McWilliams hooning around a racetrack.

Next year KTM's sports tourer is no longer the 1290, becoming the new 1390. Essentially, it's been handed the chassis and beefy V-twin from the stupendous Super Duke R Evo supernaked. This means a stiffer frame and lower centre of gravity, WP semi-active suspension, and the previous piddly 1301cc engine being replaced by the 1350cc unit complete with variable valve timing and a claimed 187bhp. Eek. Riding modes are rejigged to give Rain, Street, Sport and a new Custom, plus further optional modes that include – yes, you guessed – a track setting. KTM even promote the tyre pressure monitoring by saying how handy it is for adjusting your tyres for circuit riding.

> ‘Go-faster hardware also comes with sensible stuff’

And yet. Along with all this go-faster hardware and trickery comes some sensible stuff. KTM reckon the biggest difference you'll notice compared to the outgoing model is the electronic suspension's Comfort mode, which they say was where they put all their attention during development. Fifth and sixth gear are lowered, no longer feeling like overdrive and giving greater high-gear flexibility. Long trudges are further made easier by the touchscreen function of the vast letterbox-like TFT display with simplified menus for all the electronic thingummies. Improved switchgear, too.

Something called ‘CCU3.0’ lets the bike reconnect with your phone for navigation or music or whatever – basically, no more scrolling, prodding and swearing every time you get back on – and there's a new front radar. This brings all sorts of cunning, including adaptive cruise, brake assist and a group riding setting. As usual, it's all activated for the first 1500km, after which you get angry when it turns off, sulk for a few weeks, then pay a dealer to reactivate.

Faster and friendlier, the 1390 Super Duke GT will be ready to burst out of dealers and scare pedestrians with its new face in January. No prices yet, but the 1290 started at £18,999 so budget for £20k…

Referred to as the H88 due to its 8.8in size, the new display is ruddy huge

ALL VERY KTM

You could paint this green and slap Kawasaki stickers on, and it'd fool no one. Bold new look couldn't be more KTM if it tried.

BACKING IT IN

There's a new ‘multi-click-system’ front brake lever, and the cornering ABS has multiple settings including Sport, Supermoto, and Supermoto+. Sideways it is, then.

PICS: KTM

[BIKE'S PICK: SPORTSBIKE]

Panigale for the

All new **Ducati Panigale V2** has a comfier riding position, variable valve motor, less weight and road-focused suspension. Oh yes...

In many ways this new Panigale V2 is more radical than any 215bhp V4R. Instead of giving the new V2 more power, Ducati say they've focused on what makes a great road bike: light weight, thumping midrange and sweet handling. The result is that the new V2 makes 120bhp rather than the old bike's 155bhp, but weighs 17kg less. At just 176kg without fuel, it's the lightest Panigale ever.

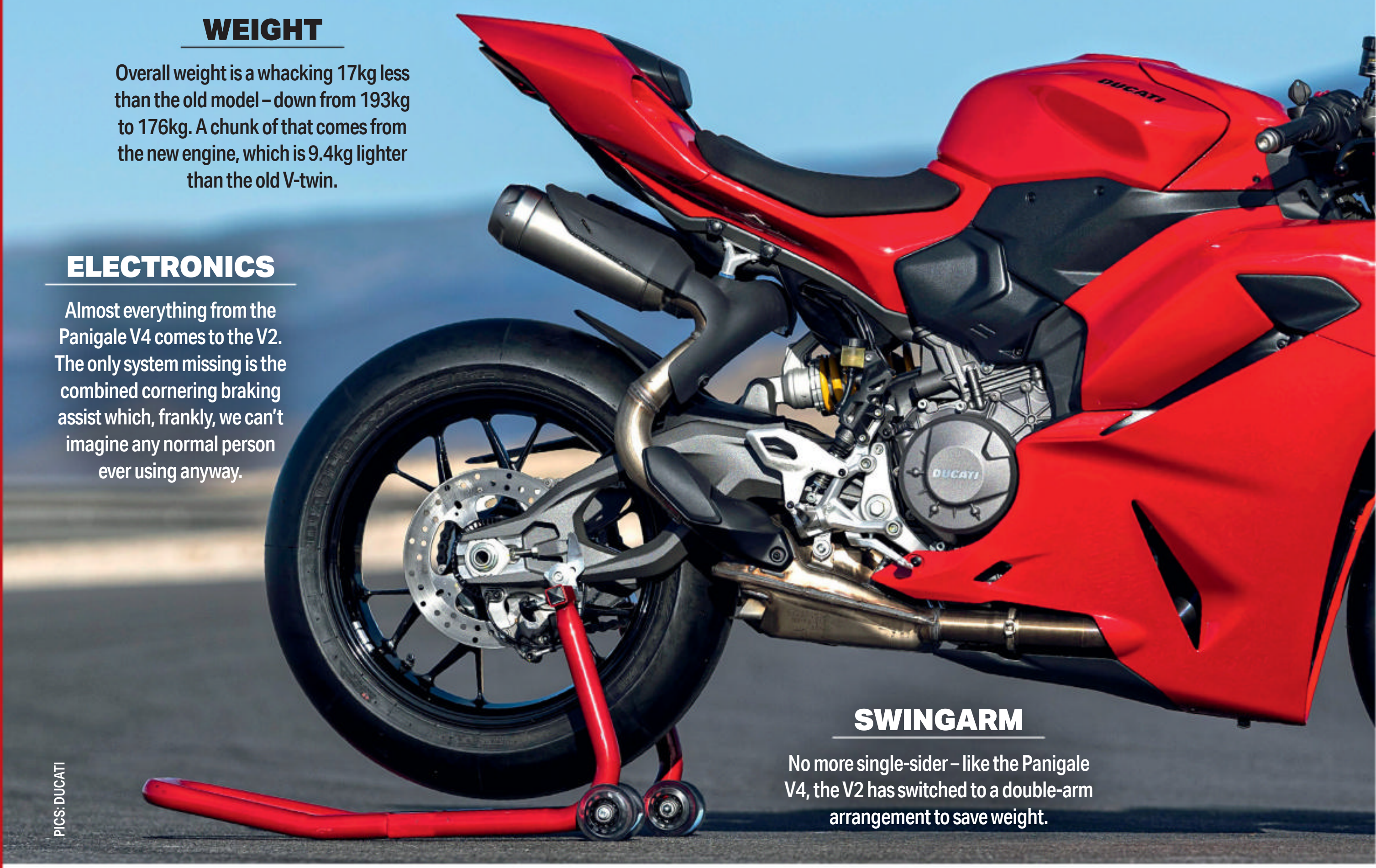
It's also technically very different from the track-focused Panigale V4, rather than being the traditional mini-me. The engine, for example, isn't just a V-twin rather than a V4, but uses a completely different top end with – shock horror – no desmodromic valve train.

Like the latest Multistrada motors, the new twin relies on springs and rocker arms for valve actuation, and has variable timing on the inlet valves – at the end of the inlet camshafts there's a 'phase variator' that changes the valve overlap depending on revs and throttle opening. This helps the 890cc twin make more than 70 per cent of its maximum torque from 3000rpm, with 80 per cent available from 4000rpm. In other words: it has a fruity midrange. It's also the lightest V-twin engine Ducati have ever made.

Couple all that with comments tucked away in Ducati's press release about the handlebars 'not putting too much strain on the wrists' and the footpeg position being 'designed so as not to tire the knees too much' and you'd be forgiven for thinking the Panigale has gone all sports tourer. Probably not: one of Ducati's test riders lapped the Vallelunga Circuit just 0.2s slower on the new V2 than he did on the old model, despite the 35bhp deficit. The new bike was apparently faster everywhere apart from the straight. So it's still quite nippy and enjoys a corner.

Like the old bike, the V2 has a monocoque frame that forms the airbox and uses the engine as a stressed member, but the swingarm is now double-sided (like the V4) and the suspension is all new. The standard Panigale gets fully adjustable 43mm Marzocchi forks instead of the old bike's Showas, and there's a Kayaba shock rather than a Sachs. The S model gets Öhlins front and rear.

Electronics are the usual top-end Ducati fare, including four riding modes (Race, Sport, Road, Wet) and the V4's 'slide-by-brake' system that lets you slam on the rear brake going into corners knowing the electronics will deliver a saucy rear wheel drift rather than a calamitous corner-entry highside.



WEIGHT

Overall weight is a whacking 17kg less than the old model – down from 193kg to 176kg. A chunk of that comes from the new engine, which is 9.4kg lighter than the old V-twin.

ELECTRONICS

Almost everything from the Panigale V4 comes to the V2. The only system missing is the combined cornering braking assist which, frankly, we can't imagine any normal person ever using anyway.

SWINGARM

No more single-sider – like the Panigale V4, the V2 has switched to a double-arm arrangement to save weight.

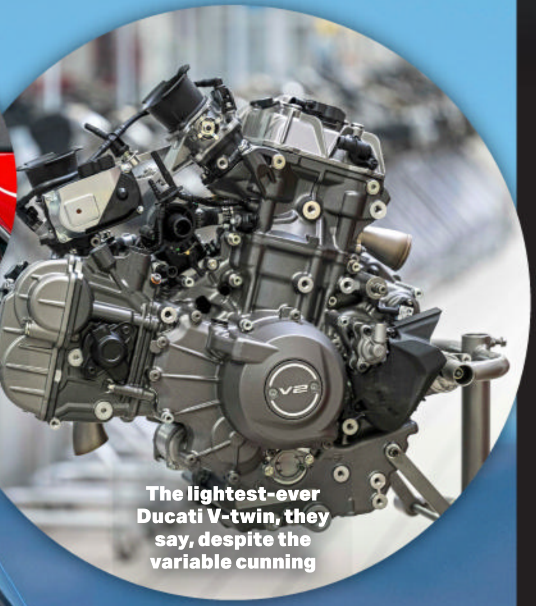
PICS: DUCATI

people

A new five-inch TFT has three layouts – Road, Road Pro and Track – that prioritise the most relevant information and get rid of unnecessary clutter. Ducati have also ditched the separate gear shift indicator by incorporating it into the rev counter that turns green when you should shift up and red when you're over-revving it.

Good news on prices. The new Panigale V2 is £14,995, which is £2200 less than the departing model. Add two grand more for the V2S. It'll start flying out of showrooms in March.

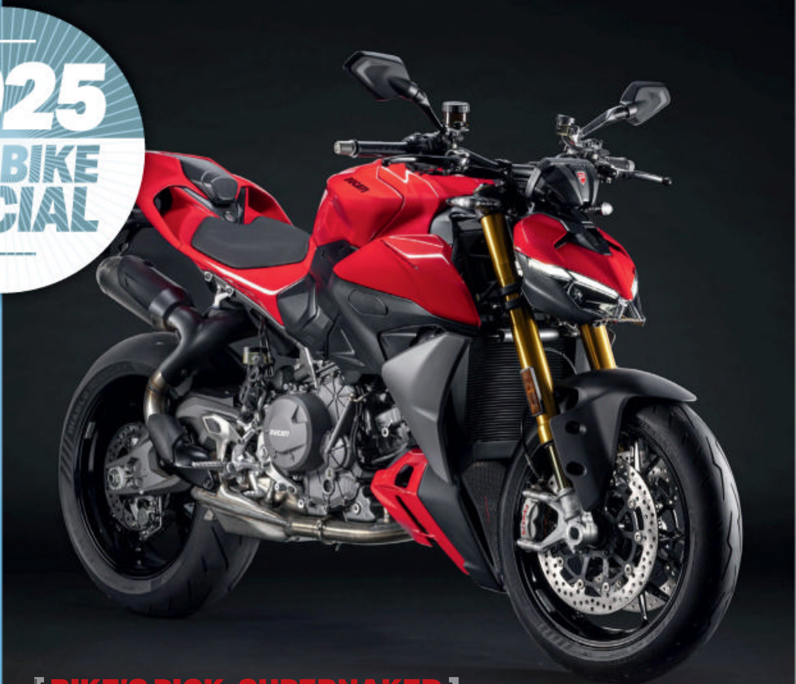
World's curliest exhaust...



The lightest-ever Ducati V-twin, they say, despite the variable cunning

ENGINE

All new 890cc V-twin (the old one was 955cc) with conventional valve springs rather than the usual desmodromics (boo, etc). Variable timing on the intake valves boosts low and midrange performance. Peak power is 120bhp.



[BIKE'S PICK: SUPERNAKED]

Quite epic enough, ta

Hot new **Ducati Streetfighter V2** has everything a naked sportsbike needs

Building a new Panigale V2 means there's a new Streetfighter V2 as well. And this makes us happy. While there's little wrong with the departing version, it's quite a demanding swine. With 151bhp from its blunt desmo V2 and a circuit-biased chassis, it's glorious on track or when riding like your pants are alight on smooth roads, but the words 'plush' and 'manageable' weren't on its design brief.

Being based on the Panigale means the new Streetfighter V2 has the same 120bhp variable valve V-twin engine, Marzocchi forks, Kayaba shock (Öhlins both ends for the S version) and double-sided swingarm. It also means the new bike is deliciously light. Claimed to be just 177kg wet but without fuel (175kg for the S), it's a whopping great 18kg lighter than the previous bike. It's the lightest Streetfighter model ever, and with high, wide 'bars it looks very much like being 'intuitive to ride, lively and enjoyable', just like Ducati claim. Looks a fit, fast, fun road-going supernaked to us.

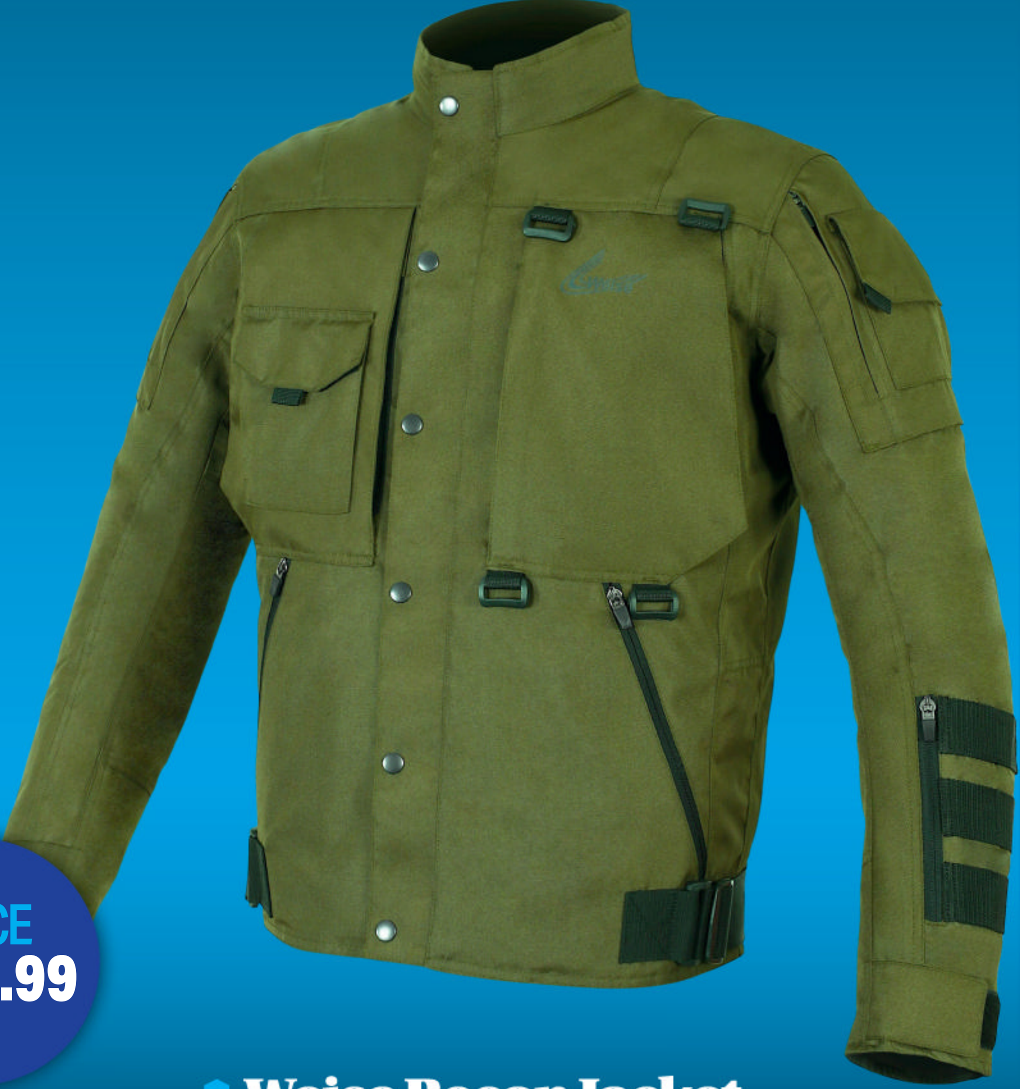
Price for the Streetfighter V2 is £13,990 – that's £2405 cheaper than the old model. Accessories include a loud pipe, yes, but also cruise, navigation and tyre monitoring. Here in time for spring.

Obviously a Streetfighter, but clearly the new 'un

GET IN GEAR

The latest word in swanky riding gear, desirable bolt-ons and must-have goodies for your pride and joy

By **Lyle Armitage**



PRICE £219.99

Weise Recon Jacket

WHAT IS IT? An on-trend textile jacket with fashionable military-style looks, with nine – count ’em, – external pockets. It’s AA certified and includes lightweight RE ZRO CE level 1 armour for your back, shoulders and elbows, plus a robust 600D polyester outer shell. It’s also windproof. Available in either black (no) or olive (yes please), sizes S to 5XL.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? Textiles no longer all look like they were designed in 1996. This is a good thing. The Recon is waterproof – not all trendy textiles are, y’know – as well as windproof. Looks like the sort of thing that’d become a go-to favourite to wear all year round. All the pockets and compartments really add to the style of the jacket and mean plenty of opportunity to misplace your keys, credit card, ear plugs, shopping list…

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM? £219.99 weiseclothing.com

New stuff

Clobber for you and your motorcycle

» Alpinestars Crestone Gore-Tex Gloves

WHAT IS IT? Designed for all-weather touring, the Alpinestars Crestone are one of the few short-cuff winter gloves on the market. They feature a Gore-Tex membrane with serious-sounding Gore Grip, and PrimaLoft insulation for heat retention and moisture wicking. Rated to CE level 1-KP, with extra impact padding on the fingers and thumb.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? Most people would prefer long-cuff gloves for winter, but they're a faff to get under your jacket sleeves (which are never flappy enough). Getting kitted up can take forever. No such messing with these, which will be easy to put on yet still stop worries about getting hypothermia or wet fingers.

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM?
£94.99 **alpinestars.com**

alpinestars
33°48'42" N 118°20'6" W
GORE-TEX

PRICE
£94.99

« Ruroc Eox Photochromic Visor

WHAT IS IT? The latest addition to Brit firm Ruroc's Eox range of helmets is this transition visor, which reacts to changing light conditions. It takes just a few seconds to darken from 'clear' to 'smoke', reducing the visible light transmitted (VLT) from 80 per cent to 15 per cent. An anti-fog treatment has also been applied, with the option to add a Pinlock insert, too.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? Visors like this are great. They mean no messing around at the side of the road when the sun breaks through on an early morning commute, and no tiresome visor swaps to remove a tinted visor for the ride home. No more squinting at the sun or getting distracted – or cursing at forgetting a spare clear/tint.

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM?
£89 **ruroc.com**

PRICE
£89

» Oxford Armourlite Hoodie

WHAT IS IT? Low-profile, practical, protective, casual-look textiles aimed firmly at the urban rider. Three styles of hoodie are available, all CE AA certified with level 2 shoulder and elbow armour, along with matching jogging pants (£119.99). Neat touches include thumb loops, belt connectors, and a secret waterproof pocket for stashing stuff.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? This achieves the casual 'it's not bike gear – honest' look very well. There are three styles to choose from, two with zip fronts and one that's a pullover. Despite the unprotective appearance they are all armoured and should shrug off a prang, and yet will be soft and cosseting and snuggly. And the essential waterproof pocket for valuables, too.

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM?
£149.99 **oxfordproducts.com**

PRICE
£149.99

V4 Victory

Yamaha are ditching their inline-four engine in MotoGP. **Jamie Turner** looks at how and why the V4 configuration now dominates the class

By **Jamie Turner**

Jamie Turner is Professor of Engines at KAUST. He owns a BMW K1200S and loves two-strokes.

Motorsport is a funny thing. The longer rules stay the same and tech advances, the more engineers converge on a single solution. Sometimes the regulations force it; sometimes it's cold, hard logic coupled with the beauty of hard sums. It's happening in MotoGP, where Yamaha are developing a new V4 engine, despite theirs being the last bastion of the inline four. It means the V4 engine is approaching hegemony in the class.

However, not all V4s are the same. We still have some room for brand differentiation and different approaches.

First, let's consider how we got here. In 2002, the new MotoGP was open season on novel solutions, with interesting regs built around the number of cylinders, giving myriad possible engine configurations. Two and three-cylinder bikes had a minimum weight limit of 135kg; fours and fives had to be over 145kg, and sixes above 155kg. Yamaha built the YZR-M1 inline four, presumably for synergies with road bikes but also probably because of using the configuration in WSB (more related to road tech, of course). Conversely, Honda, who were still in their pomp, really leaned into the intellectual horsepower and concocted a 75.5° V5, taking full advantage of the weight limits. The unusual bank angle was fundamental to how this engine was balanced and is indicative that they did not go for power at the expense of all else; the RC211V's motor was part of a cohesive approach that also used its necessary unusual firing order for better traction, coupled with the rear (two) cylinders being configured to give the narrowest arrangement where the rider's legs were.

Sure enough, not being hamstrung by a need to use a long engine and with all manner of well-thought-through logic, the RC211V dominated – a rule change was needed to reset everything.

Blazing a trail... of sorts

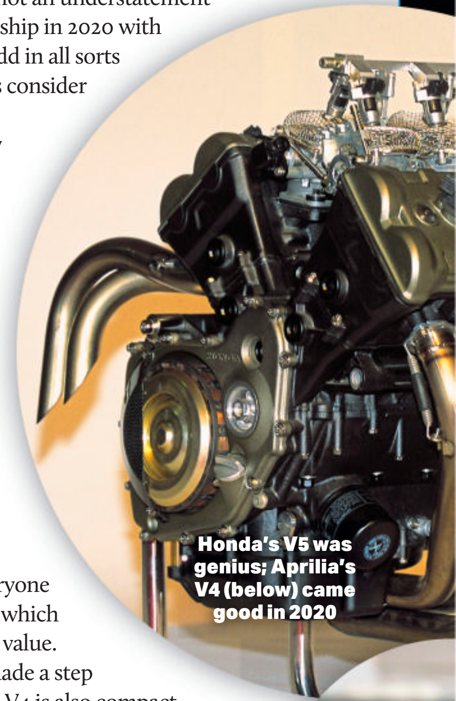
Before we get to that, I should say that Suzuki were ahead of the game engine-wise. For their GSV-R project they built a V4 – the first in the four-stroke era. However, their foresight was squandered by a couple of things: they continued to use a two-stroke GP chassis, instead of conceiving the whole machine together, and this in turn led to a necessity for a very narrow 60° Vee angle. This probably compromised the intake system (it was later expanded to 65°, which seems the minimum in race engine design because of port angles). For the effectiveness of this, just compare its results with Honda's ground-up-newness approach. Going down in cylinder count, Aprilia were also in the mix at the start with the RS Cube, it being a triple to get the 10kg advantage, but with input from Cosworth who were still in F1 at the time. Thus, the Cube got pneumatic valves (not the norm then), monster power and a fearsome reputation. Although it wasn't massively successful, it did show there was room for original thought (even if there are no points for that).

A year later, Ducati fielded a V4. Ducati sort of had to have a Vee engine for DNA reasons but a twin wouldn't have cut it, so a V4 it was. Since their V-twins had 90° Vee angles they adopted that, taking a hit on installed length, but at least they had years of history and about a million WSB victories to help them build a race-winning bike while carrying that 'disadvantage' – but we'll come back to that. Compared to the Suzuki, it also likely gave an uncompromised intake layout.

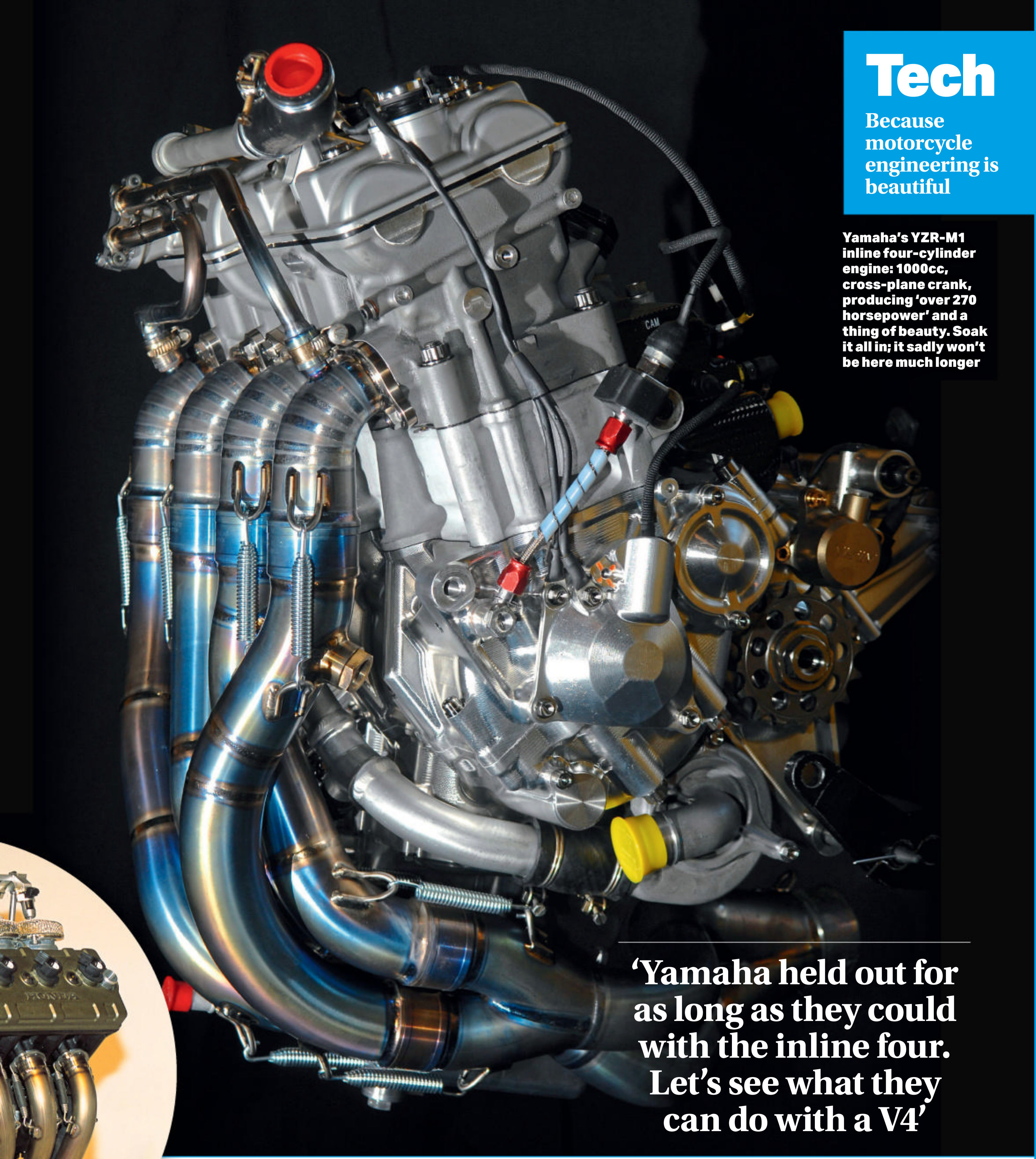
To control power and speed, MotoGP went to 800cc in 2007 with a four-cylinder limit (shame). This is where convergence started. Essentially Honda simply took the centre cylinder out of the front bank of the RC211V to make the RC212V; pretty much everything else was the same, including the bank angle. While Honda obviously had serious history with the V4 configuration it was really pragmatism that created that MotoGP engine (with the 'wrong' bank angle versus the RC30, RC45, etc). Thus, there were three V4s in the class, albeit all with different bank angles, two being fielded by teams at the sharp end. While Kawasaki had and would come in with an inline four, with very mixed results, anyone thinking seriously about entering would surely think the V4 looked the winningest solution. Since weight distinctions had been canned, why do anything else? (Every sweeping statement has an exception... Suzuki re-entered in 2014 with an inline four. One could say they had mixed results, and it would be true, and nothing if not an understatement because they won the championship in 2020 with Joan Mir... But the season was odd in all sorts of ways because of Covid, so let's consider it an outlier regarding engine configuration. Suzuki eventually pulled out, and that season may prove the I4's swansong.)

More than just imitation

Over time, and as MotoGP moved back to 1000cc, re-entrants such as KTM and Aprilia adopted V4s. But hey, this is racing, so there must be better reasons than copycat orthodoxy, right? Indeed, there are. Balance is very good with a V4, although it changes from being excellent at 90° to not so excellent as you move away; everyone seems to have converged on 90° which is (to an engine guy) the 'correct' value. Honda now use it, and Aprilia made a step forward when they adopted it. A V4 is also compact and slim – about the same width as the transmission, which becomes a limiting factor. It uses a shorter crank with fewer main bearings – a consideration for friction (although the cam drive is more complicated) – and as it's the heaviest part in the engine a short length is advantageous. Better inertia torque characteristics than an inline four too (the



Honda's V5 was genius; Aprilia's V4 (below) came good in 2020



Yamaha's YZR-M1 inline four-cylinder engine: 1000cc, cross-plane crank, producing 'over 270 horsepower' and a thing of beauty. Soak it all in; it sadly won't be here much longer

> 'Yamaha held out for as long as they could with the inline four. Let's see what they can do with a V4'

reason Yamaha went cross-plane crank in their I4), and it lends itself to funny firing intervals for traction experimentation. So, while I will profess a bias here, it is, surely, *the* high-performance bike configuration, and, being a Vee configuration, it is reassuringly expensive…

So, why now for Yamaha?

We only have two more seasons at 1000cc before a capacity drop to 850; presumably they could have held out until then. Well, in addition to the aforementioned advantages, sooner or later the 'if you can't beat them, join them' view must play a part. Rider insistence too; if you are on your uppers in the championship, good luck with attracting top talent if you are out on a limb technically and everyone thinks – whether true or not – that it is part of the problem. On top of this, not doing something now might have led to oblivion in the class.

If building a clean-sheet V4 for the final two years of the current regs doesn't show how serious Yamaha are to potential riders, they have also enrolled the help of ex-Ferrari man Luca Marmorini to help with their engine programme – and he helped the Aprilia V4 make its big step forward in 2020. It rather looks as if they are going all in. Some may uncharitably see it as a final throw of the dice but, surely, we hope not. The championship needs its Japanese teams.

Yamaha held out for as long as they could with the inline four. Let's see what they can do with a V4. Who knows, they might even call it the VMAX-M1… Bike

The original, 2003 launch, nipping around Estoril

2003 V 2024 Honda CBR600RR

Honda brought back their shrieking supersport tool this year, 21 years after it first arrived. Just how much different is the latest emissions-meeting incarnation from the 2003 original?

By **Chris Newbigging**

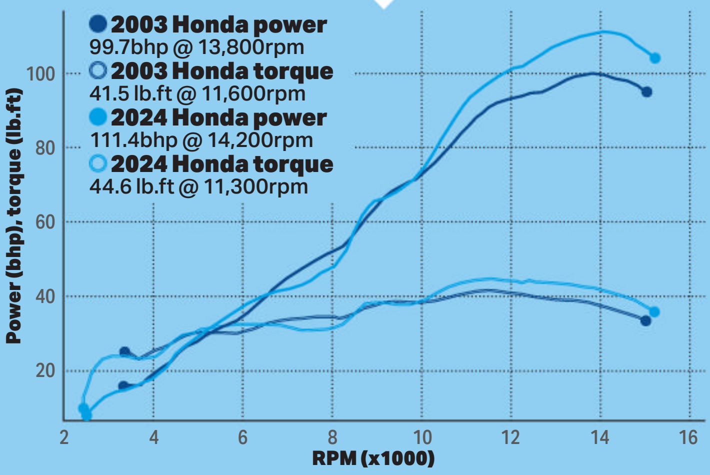
Latest bike, popping out for some lunch

This was a serious amount of revs in 2003

All the TFT-ness and widgets you can eat

	2003 HONDA	2024 HONDA
POWER	**100bhp** Three-figure power (99.7bhp, near enough) for first full-on RR. Fizzier and less flexible than 600F-S that went before, still reasonably usable.	**111bhp** The 'new' engine is really an evolution of the 2007 unit. Honda have done a fine job of cleaning emissions and retaining top-end power.
TORQUE	**42 lb.ft** No, not much, and it needs smoking to almost twelve grand to get it. Long, linear delivery is better for exit grip/drive, so that's what it had.	**45 lb.ft** A bit more, but also delivered marginally earlier. Still needs caning like a Victorian pickpocket, as the extra grunt is offset by longer gearing.
WEIGHT	**201kg** Surprisingly porky. Stainless underseat exhaust is partly responsible, and though that never went away the 2005-on model lost 6kg.	**194kg** More electronic widgets, ABS doodahs and fatter cats on latest CBR, so this is impressive. Thanks to improved materials and smart design.
MPG	**41mpg** Honda's first dual-stage fuel injection is a little inefficient and snatchy. Power Commander fitment was a must for comfort and economy.	**51mpg** Ride by wire and modern engine management makes it nice to ride in a more sophisticated way. Wasted fuel is minimised, range goes up.
TOP SPEED	**156mph** Only a couple of em-pee-aitch faster than the old steel-frame CBR, but hey – nudging 160mph is quite fast enough for a wee 600, right?	**155mph** Longer gearing (for racing and noise testing) and wings (they're trendy) hurt acceleration and top speed. A surprise defeat.
PRICE	**£7800** In 2003, that is. Decent used examples are under £3k, a bit over for minters. Original list price equates to £13,800 today with inflation.	**£10,529** £10k-ish for the bike that won the 2024 British Supersport title is fine value. Using the same frame and cases for 16 years cuts R&D costs.

ON THE DYNO



Testing notes: Incremental development laid bare: similar curve, one slightly lifted. Dips and peaks accentuated on the 2024 but it doesn't feel this way – dyno sees things your backside can't feel.

AT THE PROVING GROUND

2003 HONDA		2024 HONDA
3.38s	0-60MPH	3.72s
11.35s @ 129.9mph	1/4 MILE	11.34s @ 129.4mph
49.3m	70-0MPH	56.7m
7.2s	40-80 ROLL-ON	8.2s

Testing notes: The old bike defies dyno and scales to be briskest off the line, match the new bike's quarter-mile time, and be faster everywhere. It also doesn't have ABS, which means ace speed tester Bruce hauls it up sharply and manages grip more precisely than ABS can – in controlled conditions, at least.

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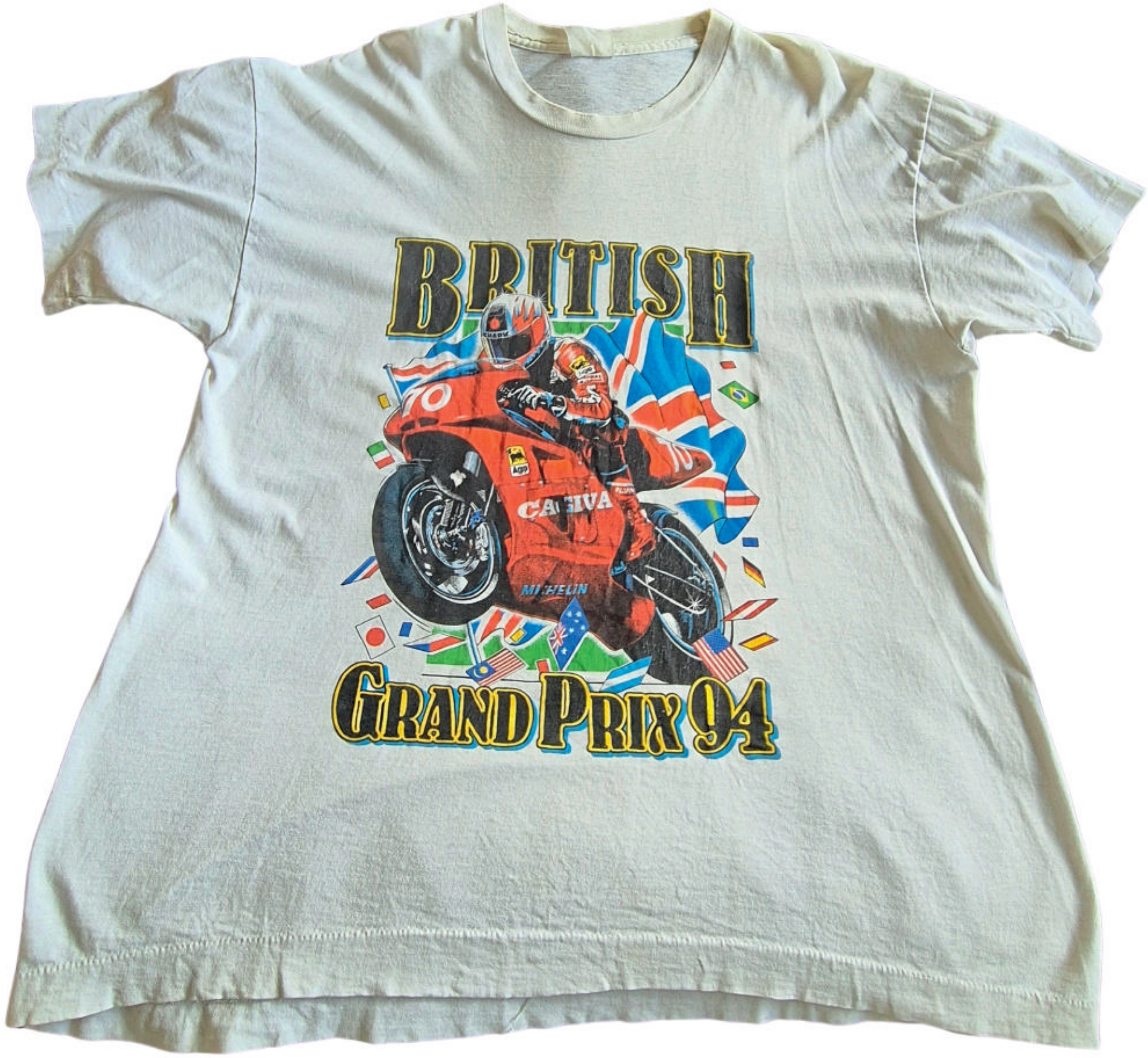


[**BEEN THERE, GOT THE T-SHIRT**]

'A Grand Prix weekend that cemented my love of bikes'

The 1994 British Grand Prix at Donington Park was my first trip to a GP on my Suzuki RF600, and I went with a couple of pals on a Honda VFR750 and Ducati 916. It was a wild weekend of booze, camping (not in the zoo, thank God), detonated bike engines, and idiots wheelieing through other people's tents. It was also special being present at my favourite 500 rider Kevin Schwantz's 25th and final win. It was a weekend that cemented my love of bikes.

David Saunders

IF YOU'VE GOT AN OLD T-SHIRT LIKE DAVID'S AND FANCY SEEING IT IN *BIKE*, TAKE A PICTURE OF THE *WHOLE* SHIRT, ARMS INCLUDED, AND EMAIL IT TO THE ADDRESS AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE. IF WE PUBLISH IT WE'LL SEND YOU A NEW T-SHIRT.

[STAR LETTER]

'Variety feeds the addiction'

Editor Armitage's Hello column (*Bike*, December), with his view about the passion of motorcycling in its various forms, really struck a chord.

I discovered this great pleasure in 1972 when, aged nine and temporarily living in Michigan, a mate introduced me to the superb Honda CT70 Mini-Trail (forerunner to the Honda 125 Dax). Motorcycling has been an addiction from that moment, and I have been fortunate to own a number of superb machines over the years.

But the bike that has provided the most smiles per mile recently is my Honda 125 Monkey. There is no raw power and at 6ft 3in I almost certainly look ridiculous, but the 'grin factor' is off the scale. It proves (for me at least) that the enjoyment of motorcycling comes in so many forms. This variety continues to feed the addiction – I just hope there is no cure.

Andrew Porter

Andrew's Monkey. Smiling is everything, size less so

EACH MONTH WE GIVE AWAY A CABERG DUKE II HELMET AND A YEAR'S SUBSCRIPTION TO *BIKE* FOR THE MONTH'S STAR LETTER. ON YOUR MARKS

Keep it up, kids

Having turned the final page of the very enjoyable December issue, I had to write to say how much I enjoyed the article featuring Lyle and Finley.

Like many readers, I cut my teeth on a 50cc two-stroke moped in the 70s, but I take my hat off to them for their ingenuity, determination and perseverance on keeping those two bikes on the road. The experience and learning will last a lifetime.

Reading about these young guys gives hope to my cynical mind that all is not lost and there is a youth culture out there with a more positive outlook. If mental health is the scourge of the young, what better way to tackle it than doing something practical and away from mobiles, social media and computer screens.

Nick Turnbull,
Burley in Wharfedale

Young dogs, old tricks

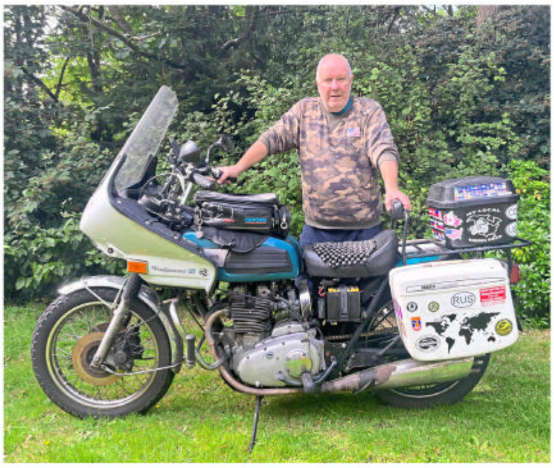
I enjoyed the article on high-mileage bikes (*Bike*, December) but couldn't help notice the owners were also a little superannuated (I'm 59 so I'm allowed to say such things).

It's rather depressing that bikers are getting older and we may be suffering the same terminal decline as pubs. When I think of the standout moments of my life, nearly all have involved bikes or pubs (admittedly, some of the sex was okay too).

I'm happy for young people to Face-Tik and Insta-Tok but I'm saddened that they are missing out on an accessible pursuit that has seen me travel the world and experience joy, exhilaration and companionship.

Therefore, I was delighted when I flipped to page 103 and saw Lyle and Finley talking about their moped adventures. Great stuff. We need more chaps like them starting out on bikes and hopefully discovering pubs. Maybe not at the same time, though…

Chris Pike, Norfolk



High praise for the high-mile heroes – like John Young's Trident T160

High-mile King

John Westlake's article on very high mileage bikes (*Bike*, December) made for interesting reading. I noted that they were mostly Japanese machines, but the Triumph Trident deserves a special mention.

Some years ago I joined a tour group heading to Colditz Castle in Germany from Surrey. The usual collection of adventure bikes were in attendance together with the odd sports tourer and a couple of nakeds. But one bike stood out: a Suzuki B-King that looked very tired but had covered 390,000 miles. Yes, three hundred and ninety thousand miles – all on the original engine.

The owner was an ex-police officer and a very skilled rider who joined the 'fast group' all the way there and back. The bike didn't miss a beat. Apparently, when the bike is finally put to pasture, Suzuki have asked if they can have it back to carry out a full forensic examination.

Steve Meston

200k target

I loved reading about the high-mileage bikes (*Bike*, December), particularly as mine is right up there with them.

My 2002 Honda CB500 has 153,746 miles on it. Did the valve shims once but otherwise the engine is original. The bike has been incredibly reliable with only a handful of parts replaced.

Worst bit was at 138,000 when someone sped across a supermarket car park in front of me. My only thought as I flew through the air was 'damn, I won't make 150k'. Fortunately the damage was only cosmetic and it was only written off due to the value. So I got salvage of the bike – and after sourcing replacement bodywork and a few other bits off eBay it was back on the road. Next target: 200k.

Tim Ralph

Peak writing

After more than 50 years a reader, I have just read the greatest line I have ever read in a motorcycle magazine: 'Gone are ludicrous power bands hidden so high up the rev range you needed a team of Sherpas to find them.' (*Group test*, *Bike* December).

Great writing; keep it up.

Edwin Swannick

Today's middleweight sportsbikes: no Sherpas required

Awesome adventure

Ace magazine this month, guys (*Bike*, December). So many interesting articles and excellent photography.

Just reading *Big world, small bikes*. Very well written and just the right amount of humour, too. Not forgetting the layout and artwork.

Steve Hearn, Suffolk

Back on the road

Two hundred ridden miles after a 40-year break from biking, I was out on a glorious October Sunday afternoon ride getting used to my recently acquired Suzuki Intruder 600.

Stupidly, when joining a queue on the A249 I managed to stall the engine and got myself in such a state that I think I stripped the starter motor gear and could not get the engine running again.

I tried, but I can't bump-start 200kg on my own, and my favourite recovery service say they don't do bikes anymore. So I'm stranded miles from home on a busy, noisy road.

To cut a long story short, a passing Kawasaki rider stopped to ask what's wrong, gave me a hand and got me going again. So, a big thank you to him and to all the other bikers out there who are good enough to stop for an old git in trouble. You make biking the great thing it is.

Martin Bateman

Grand Prix glamour

When working with KLM Engineering and Maintenance in Schiphol East, I passed the Roberts Yamaha workshop in Aalsmeerderbrug many times on my bicycle on my way to work or home.

During the racing season there were always race trucks parked next to or in front of the shop. And there was always a caravan parked. Never realised Tom O'Kane was living there. I thought it was used by Team Roberts during the races.

Thank you for a great interview. I also had a look at the thesis – it is really befuddling.

Herman Tollenaar

Marvellous Matlock

Loved the article on your ride to Matlock Bath (*Bike*, November).

I can add a bit of history to your story. In the 1950s my brother David Tye – a works rider for BSA in trials and scrambles – opened a bike shop, petrol station and café in Cromford, two miles from Matlock Bath. At weekends it was inundated with bikers who passed through Matlock Bath on Gold Stars, Triumphs, Vincents and all other makes, to my delight.

When the business was closed in the '60s, these bikers had nowhere to go, but loving the area transferred their attentions to Matlock Bath – and oh my, how has it grown.

John Cooper, Mick Andrews and I cemented our friendships at that time and we're all still riding, although we're well north of 80.

Jonathan Tye

'Magical Mick', 'Coop', and 'Bomber Jon' Tye at a classic meet in Matlock

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High class

MV Agusta have built an adventure bike. To find out if that's an idea up there with chocolate teapots and soluble canoes, *Bike* heads for the Peak District on the Enduro Veloce

By **Martin Fitz-Gibbons**
Photography **Jason Critchell**

One of the most powerful figures in European motorcycling was recently asked for his thoughts on MV Agusta's plan to build adventure bikes. 'Nobody needs those,' he declared. 'Nobody is waiting for such a model from MV Agusta.'

The words of KTM's fabulously forthright figurehead Stefan Pierer – the man whose company now owns 50.1 per cent of MV Agusta – echo around my otherwise largely unoccupied skull. Beneath me, the bike nobody needs nor wants glides effortlessly through space, time and early morning Lincolnshire. Around us, freshly harvested fields shimmer pale gold under late-summer sun, sharp-edged stacks of straw bales towering proud from flat farmland like alien agricultural monoliths. They look somehow weird: nature, forced into unnatural shapes.

As weird as an MV adventure bike? Maybe. It's definitely a radical departure for one of the most iconic, exotic and quixotic badges in motorcycling. For 25 years MV Agusta have specialised in spicy superbikes and sultry supernakeds drawn by two of biking's most talented crayon-wielders: Massimo Tamburini and Adrian Morton. With prices reassuringly high and sales numbers best described as 'exclusive', their bikes have been as much myth as metal. You're hardly likely to see one parked outside your local Lidl.

That forbidden-fruit aura and those luscious lines made me an MV fanboy early on. I lusted after the original F4 750 Serie Oro; decades later I finally bought a well-used Turismo Veloce (*Bike*, Nov 22). But I sold a BMW F800GS to fund it, while the MV now shares a garage with a Honda CRF250 Rally. Hang on – so I like adventure bikes, too?

Did you ever expect to see an MV Agusta doing this? Nope, neither did we...

Is the Venn diagram intersection of Agusta appreciation and knobbly enthusiasm… me? Am I the 'nobody' Stefan was talking about?

MV Agusta's first adventure bike is the Enduro Veloce. Actually, it's not – that was the LXP Orioli, a 500-unit headline-grabber personally signed by Cagiva legend and Dakar winner Edi Orioli, yours for €30,000 (£24,990). This Enduro Veloce is the cooking version – mostly the same mechanicals but minus the Lucky Strike-esque paint job, Edi's squiggle, a certificate of gullibility authenticity, and a price set at 'just' £20,000. Cough, splutter, etc.

Stepping on to planet adventure may be a giant leap for MV-kind, but one element of the Enduro feels instantly familiar: its engine. The 931cc triple is a big-bored, long-stroked evolution of the 800 in my Turismo. Power is up to a claimed 122bhp, but the crank still spins backwards, it still takes half a second too long on the starter motor to fire up, and it still sounds and feels absolutely glorious.

It's the bike's literal and figurative heart – growling, scowling and snarling with a guttural aggression and swarthy swagger no Triumph or Yamaha triple comes close to. The way it pulls is perpetually addictive, surging with feral charisma from barely off tickover right through to its five-figure redline. MV reckon 85 per cent of its maximum 75 lb.ft of torque is available from just 3000rpm, and on the basis of this morning's graceful, effortless, grin-inducing overtakes there's no reason to doubt it.

And despite this being fully Euro 5+ kosher, it's surely the best-sounding standard exhaust in motorcycling right now – vibrant, rich and coarse. Yet the Enduro Veloce has an unexpectedly polite side too, like a werewolf that knows where the salad fork goes. With the cruise control set there's no nasty vibes through 'pegs or 'bars, while the pair of large, well-placed mirrors keep crystal clear. Hang on – decent mirrors? On an MV?

Top: chock full of widgets and toys, controlled on TV-size dash Above: it's good at the Veloce bit on proper roads

The weirdness continues. Wind protection is superb. The screen isn't adjustable, but at speed it does an excellent job of deflecting the atmosphere around my lid, keeping things pleasantly quiet and turbulence-free. And I'm sitting quite comfortably – a large, spacious riding position, quite upright but with my weight evenly spread, resting on top of a compliant, wide, two-piece seat.

All of which means the two-hour A-road rat run west past Newark, Mansfield and Matlock is dispatched with ease, leaving me daisy-fresh when we reach the edge of the Peak District. The scenery transforms like someone's thrown a light switch: turn out of Cromford on the A5012, and instantly the tedious ring roads and generic CostaBucks drive-thrus vanish, replaced by dry-stone walls, boundless blue skies and rolling lush landscapes. Time to get stuck in.

An empty road twisting temptingly into bucolic beauty would definitely be the natural habitat for any of MV's previous efforts – the lithe F3, or the bend-loving Brutale. But on paper the Enduro Veloce seems to have sacrificed its chassis at the altar of adventure. It rolls on a pair of

A pleasant place to be – despite the angry eyes

‘It has an unexpectedly polite side, like a werewolf that knows where the salad fork goes’

‘Motor is a beast off-road – huge power, delivered with surging whoosh rather than grunty chug’

gigantic Ferris wheels (21in front; 18in rear), rides high on long-travel suspension (210mm at both ends), and has a wheelbase so vast the two ends of the bike could be in different time zones. It’s longer, wheel-to-wheel, than a Ducati Diavel V4.

It’s not exactly light either. MV’s publicity blurb puts the Enduro’s ‘dry’ weight (always a red flag) at 224kg. *Bike*’s scales reveal its true fully fuelled figure to be 254kg. Crumbs. That’s more than Triumph claim for their Tiger 1200 Rally Pro.

And yet. Scything and swooping across to Staffordshire, this feels like the best-handling bike with a 21in front wheel that I’ve ever ridden. It doesn’t snap instantly into a corner, sure, but it rolls deftly with an engaging, encouraging, sure-footed confidence that plenty of pure road bikes would die for. There’s no ungainly tipping, wobbling or tumbling into a turn – no sign of any off-road compromise at all.

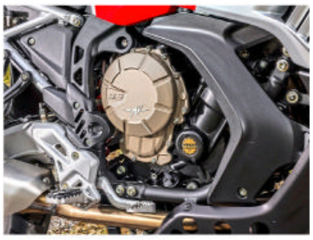
The Sachs suspension doesn’t disappoint either – no pogoing when you chuck it from side to side, no seasick weight transfer when you squeeze the mighty Brembo Stylema brakes. From open A-roads, to the switchback hairpins outside Crowdecote, to the tight-n-twisty B5053, it just feels perfectly at home. Perhaps that backwards-spinning crank really is working some gyroscopic magic.

I’m deeply impressed. But I’m not infatuated. Comfort, engine, handling, brakes – all good to great. What’s missing? It’s not a shortage of modern tech. There’s a huge 7in colour TFT dash, myriad modes, a pair of USB sockets, keyless ignition, a slick two-way quickshifter, and all the rider aids you’d ever want. Plus a few more on top – launch control, anyone?

What it lacks, I realise, is that magical MV presence. The colours – red and silver – are right but look odd split vertically instead of horizontally. I’m not bewitched by the

Insert own joke about MV taking the adventure bull by the horns...

The good, bad and indifferent



Engine

MV's new 9.5 engine is the largest version yet of the three-cylinder platform we first met in 2012's F3 675. It sounds incredible, delivers mountains of torque even from low revs, and has a distinctively raw feel that's unlike any other triple.

Windscreen

MV say they used all sorts of software simulations to get the aerodynamics spot-on. Wind protection is always a personal thing, but the Enduro Veloce's two-part screen feels good to us, offering a large pocket of protection without any buffeting.

Suspension

No electronic suspension may seem an omission given the £20k price tag. Manually adjustable Sachs kit doesn't sound particularly premium, but it's deceptively effective – firm enough to keep the chassis in check, soft enough to give a comfy ride.

Switchgear

Feels thin and unsubstantial, while the horn button has a habit of rattling about at speed. Riding modes are selected with the starter button – an odd MV trait going back years. Indicator needs a good push, otherwise they switch off after five flashes.

TFT dash

Big but cluttered. The 7in size offers masses of real estate, but MV have tried to cram too much info on, the result being lots of tiddly little letters and numbers, and only half the display given over to showing your speed and revs. Tank range guesstimator fluctuates wildly, too.

Tired old presumption about Italian electrics no longer valid

bodywork either. The shapes seem flat, square and blunt, lacking MV's trademark contours and curves. I can't spot anything daring in the design, like my Turismo's rear subframe. It's safe, familiar, even generic. Painted red, white and blue, I may mistake it for a Honda Africa Twin.

Still, we haven't come all this way for a superficial whinge. MV built an adventure bike, so the least we can do is have an adventure. I may be sat almost a metre high atop a quarter-tonne of Italian exotica wearing knobless Bridgestone A41 tyres, but by crikey we'll give it a go.

For starters, a gentle gravel byway forking off from a nameless back road. Stand up on the 'pegs, fumble into Off-Road mode and hope for the best. The trail meanders lazily over a cattle grid, round a bend and past some surprised sheep. The riding position feels good stood up, but the Enduro Veloce also feels big below me: wide, tall and long. Here it can't seem to hide its proportions like a KTM 890 Adventure or a Ducati DesertX.

Ahead, a shallow stream provides my first opportunity to get things spectacularly wrong. The MV splashes through gleefully, seemingly far less cautious than its rider, charging out the other side. That wasn't so bad. Perhaps I just need to chill out and ride with a more confident hand. I switch the traction control off and try a couple of skids in a bid to build a bond. Easier said than done. That motor is even more of a beast off-road – huge power, delivered with a surging whoosh rather than a grunty chug.

We finish up and head for another easy trail. A gentle climb lifts high on to a stony track offering a stunning panoramic view across the patchwork Peaks. It's absolutely beautiful, made even better by carefully passing a group of Highland cattle grazing lazily. It's all quite blissful.

Then the trail starts descending downhill. The gradient gets uncomfortably steep, the surface turned to loose rocks and deep craters. The Enduro Veloce is offering too much Veloce and not nearly enough Enduro. Whether it's

Red/silver the only option. Rightly so – it's an MV. Vertical split may take some getting used to, though

tall gearing, a high idle or a lack of engine braking, even with the throttle shut it's running away from me. A gentle step on the brake pedal locks the rear wheel immediately. I'm in that big-adventure-bike paradox: don't slow down and I'll crash; try to slow down and I'll crash.

Eventually – mercifully – the track levels out, the MV's momentum slows and I stagger to a stop. That's all the warning I need to tap out. I turn around, climb back up, pass the cows again, and return to terra firma. Time to head into Bakewell for a world-famous pudding.

Stefan Pierer reckoned nobody was waiting for an MV Agusta adventure bike. I'm not so sure. I don't see why a bike can't be elegant, special and desirable, but also a genuine all-terrain, all-purpose all-rounder. I'm just not convinced that's what the Enduro Veloce is. On the road it's a thrilling, rewarding and surprisingly complete bike. Gorgeous engine, evocative exhaust, remarkable handling. But it hasn't instilled the off-road confidence that an adventure bike should. And perhaps more pressingly, it hasn't left me dumbstruck with desire the way an MV should. ***Bike***

SPECIFICATIONS	MV AGUSTA ENDURO VELOCE
Contact	mvagusta.com/gb/en
Price (on the road)	£20,000
Typical finance	PCP: deposit £5279, 36 monthly payments £149, optional final payment £11,281.25 (4000 miles, 4.9% APR, total £21,924.25)
Capacity	931cc
Engine	DOHC 12v inline triple
Bore x stroke	81 x 60.2mm
Transmission	6-speed, chain
Power	122bhp @ 10,000rpm
Torque	75 lb.ft @ 7000rpm
Top speed	149mph (claimed)
Frame	steel twin beam
Front suspension	48mm usd telescopic fork, fully adjustable
Rear suspension	monoshock, fully adjustable
Brakes (f/r)	2 x 320mm discs, 4-pot calipers / 265mm disc, 2-pot caliper
Wheelbase	1610mm
Weight	254kg (wet, measured)
Seat height	850/870mm
Tank size	20 litres
Economy	48mpg (measured), 211-mile range
Electronics	cornering ABS, traction control, wheelie control, launch control, cruise control, two-way quickshifter
***Bike* Verdict** Fabulous engine meets impressive chassis meets iconic badge. It's good. Needs a bit more 'adventure' though… and a dash more 'MV', too.	
***Bike* rating**	7/10

> 'Thrilling on the road, but hasn't instilled the off-road confidence an adventure bike should'

Back on the tarmac, MFG engages 'Rallentare' mode to enjoy the best of the MV and the Peaks

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The rise – and rise – of the adventure bike

The past 20 years have witnessed the biggest change in British bike buying habits in a generation…

By **Phil West** Photography **Bauer Archive**

It's been 20 years since everything turned upside down. BMW's R80G/S had appeared in 1980 – arguably the first adventure bike – and the R1100GS and R1150GS had built a following through the 1990s and into the fresh millennium. There were others: Honda's Varadero was proven, as had been previous Paris-Dakar replicas such as the Africa Twin and Yamaha's Super Ténéré. But 'giant trailies' were still quite niche – just 10 different models were on sale in the UK in 2004.

But it was the year all that changed. In January BMW launched the R1200GS, and in October *Long Way Round* with those Ewan and Charley blokes on 1150s first aired on Sky. Two years later, the GS had become the UK's best-selling big bike. And it's remained thus ever since.

With hindsight, we should have seen it coming. *Bike*'s tester Ben Wilkins rode the R1200GS at its launch and wrote: 'I make no secret of the fact I'm a sportsbike lover. So why, as I rode down a twisting South African road, did I find my allegiances wavering? I've ridden the GS plenty of times, but this latest one is different. It has taken a leap forward.' We just didn't realise how significant that leap would be.

This popularity fuelled not only a series of successors but a whole family of GSs which has included 310, 650, 800 and 900cc models, plus an ever-increasing raft of rivals from the likes of Honda, Yamaha, KTM and Triumph. It's not just been the expected brands either – even cruiser stalwarts Harley-Davidson have got involved, along with a rapidly swelling array of Chinese names.

This growth in adventuring has in turn been mirrored by a surge in accessories, riding schools, touring companies, dedicated media, tyres and more. So, how has this adventure phenomenon come about? And is it likely to continue… well, forever? We ask experts in bikes, accessories, events and tyres to find out…

BMW sold over 30,000 GSs in 2010. Bet not many went to a motocross track, mind…

2004 v 2024

ADVENTURE MODELS (500cc and above)

2004 = 10

Honda Varadero

Suzuki V-Strom 650 and 1000

BMW F650GS, R1150GSA and R1200GS

Cagiva Navigator

Aprilia Caponord

Triumph Tiger 955

KTM 950 Adventure

2024 = 66*

Zero DSR/X

Ducati Multistrada V2 (x2) and V4 (x4), DesertX (x3)

Moto Guzzi V85 TT (x3), Stelvio

Honda NC750X, Transalp, Africa Twin (x2)

BMW F800GS, F900GS (x2), 1250GSA, R1300GS (x2)

Yamaha Ténéré 700 (x6)

CFMoto 800MT (x3)

MV Agusta Enduro Veloce (x2)

Kove 800X (x2)

Harley Pan Am (x2)

Husqvarna Norden

Suzuki V-Strom 650 (x2), 800 (x4), 1050 (x4)

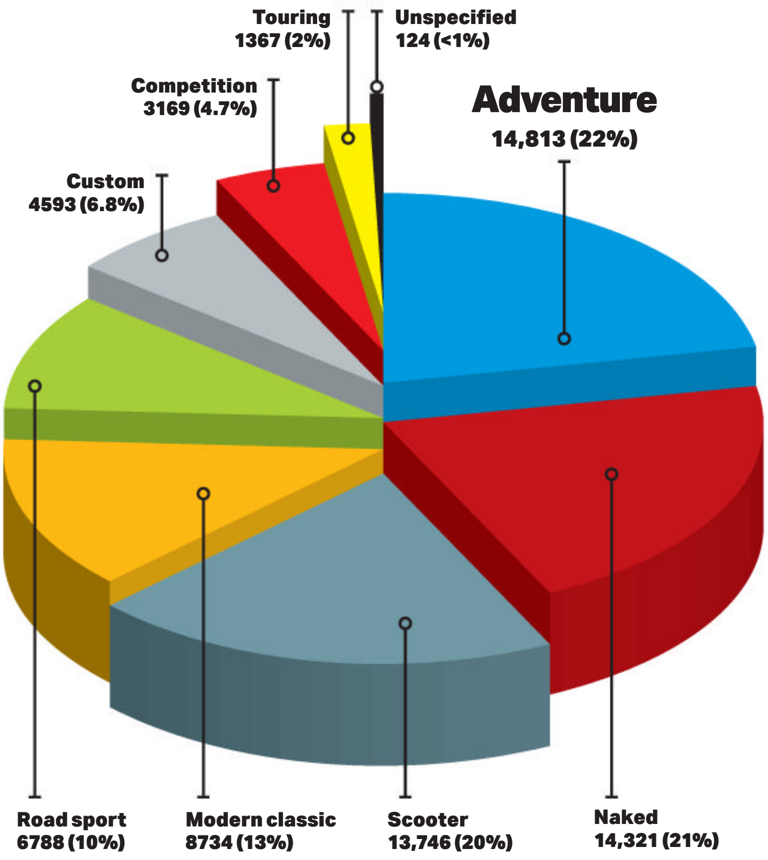
KTM 790 Adventure, 890 Adventure (x2), 1290 Adventure (x2)

Moto Morini X-Cape

Triumph Tiger 850, 900 (x3), 1200 (x4), Scrambler 1200 (x2)

(*this doesn't include road-only adventure-based bikes like the Kawasaki Versys 1100 and Multistrada Pikes Peak, and doesn't include sub-500cc bikes like the Honda NX500, BMW G310GS, Royal Enfield Himalayan, etc...)

2024 UK BIKE SALES BY CATEGORY*



Total 67,655

(* MCIA figures January-July 2024; includes everything from 125cc upwards, which is why the naked and scooter segments are vast)

Are we actually adventuring?

» 'We were very much focused on sports when I first came here, 12 or 13 years ago,' says Chris Winters, managing director of Sportsbike Shop. 'But there's definitely been a massive move over the past five to10 years.

'You see it in the manufacturers. With Alpinestars and Dainese, everything was always about sports – leather jackets, one-piece suits – but now they start [their new ranges] with the touring section. We've seen the growth of Rukka, Klim… every manufacturer has moved towards it. The most popular Forma boot is the Adventure boot. The most popular Sidi is the Adventure 2. It's the same when you see people in the shop. They're not in Alpinestars leathers, they're generally in an Oxford Mondial…

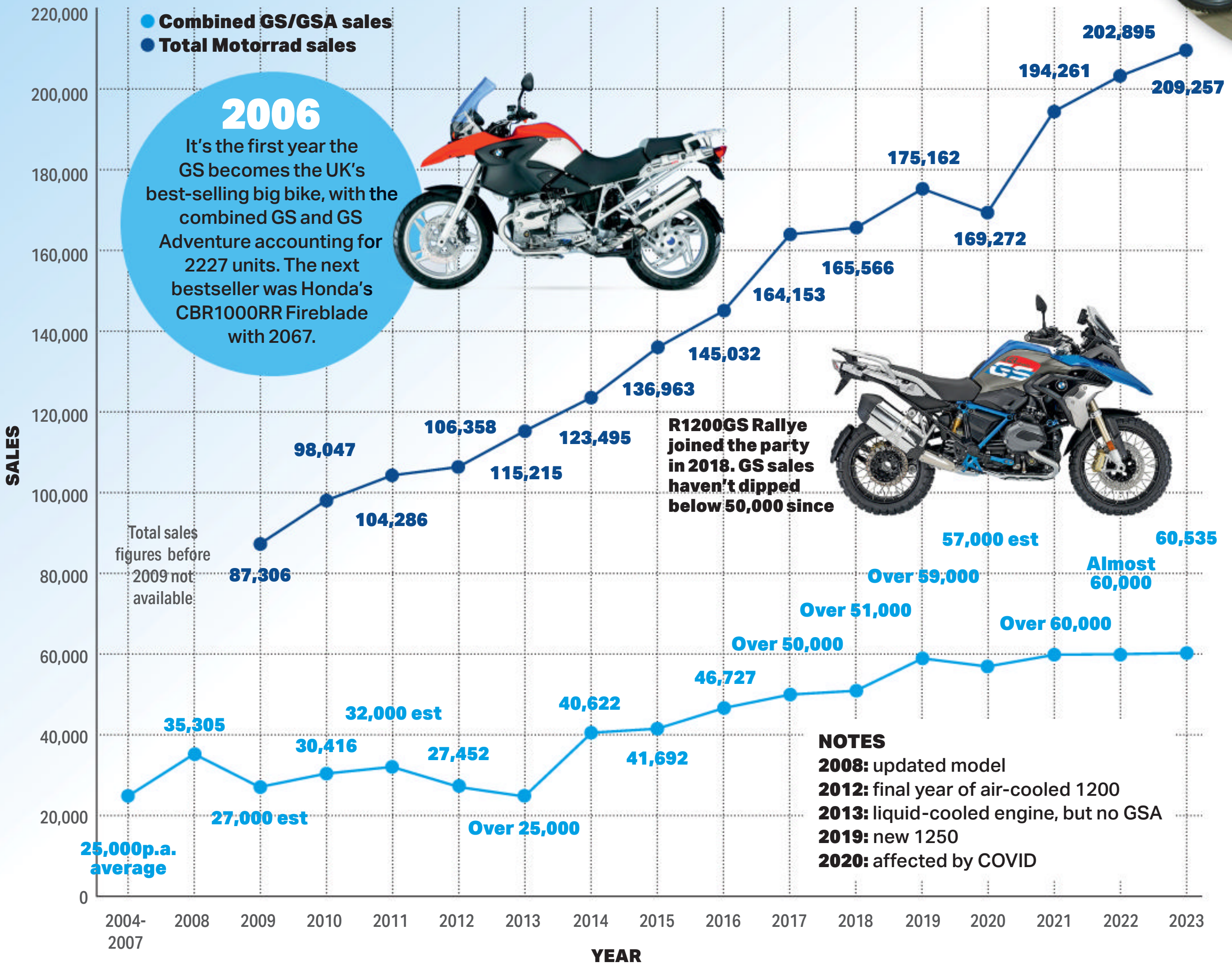
'The market has moved towards general touring. It's not specifically "adventure". We sell more flip-fronts, more intercoms, more luggage and more satnavs… It's ridiculous how many "comms" we now sell, because customers are group riding, touring, going away on longer journeys with their other half. Shad [luggage] is growing, GIVI has grown pretty much every year.

'It's the capability of the bikes, the versatility and all-round ability. They're comfortable, relaxed, a nice place to be – plus the roads are so sh*t now you don't want sports suspension, you want something supple.

'People are enjoying the ride rather than desperate to get their knee down. I don't think it's going away anytime soon.'

THE GLOBAL BOOM OF THE GS (AND BMW MOTORRAD)

NB: first four years of R1200GS are combined sales from the period, averaged



2006

It's the first year the GS becomes the UK's best-selling big bike, with the combined GS and GS Adventure accounting for 2227 units. The next bestseller was Honda's CBR1000RR Fireblade with 2067.

R1200GS Rallye joined the party in 2018. GS sales haven't dipped below 50,000 since

NOTES

2008: updated model
2012: final year of air-cooled 1200
2013: liquid-cooled engine, but no GSA
2019: new 1250
2020: affected by COVID

Has adventure changed the industry?

'The adventure tyre market was fairly straightforward 25 years ago, with each manufacturer making one or two different tyres,' reckons Cambrian Tyres' rubber expert Bryn Phillips. 'In 1999 Michelin made just the T66X; now they have five different tyres – Road 6, Anakee Road, Anakee III, Anakee Adventure and Anakee Wild. Likewise, Bridgestone made one tyre in '99, now they have six. As a result we now stock over 50 different tyres for the big GS.

'The change from sport-touring and sports tyres to adventure has been gradual. Adventure bikes sales had to increase, and there's always a delay in replacement tyre sales compared to new bike sales. As bike sales increased, tyre sales followed suit with increasing speed – especially over the past 10 years.

'Continental have always been strong in the trail sector, and we sell a heck of a lot of their tyres for adventure bikes – they make up an astonishing 35 per cent of all our Conti sales. With Michelin, adventure tyres make up 19 per cent of our road and trail sales, and this is probably much the same for other brands like Bridgestone and Metzeler.

'The choice has expanded over the past five or so years with the availability of adventure tyres from less familiar brands like Anlas, Mitas, Kenda, King Tyre and Maxxis – all make really good tyres at their price points. And you can transform an adventure bike into a trackday machine – yes, you can get racing-street tyres in sizes for the R1300GS…'

Ewan and Charlie took the long way home. GS sales have gone a long way up since

Option 719: for those who want to stand out a tad more. Helps GS sales, too

Will the GS bubble burst?

'The GS models, especially the R1250GS in recent years, have really been the backbone of BMW,' says Steve Pitt, marketing manager for BMW Motorrad. 'Riders have a deep connection with this bike, which is why it's not only a top seller but also a symbol of BMW Motorrad's lasting legacy in the motorcycling world. We see continued demand for the GS, and as the adventure segment grows, we'll keep evolving the platform with cutting-edge technology and sustainability in mind, ensuring the GS stays relevant for years to come.'

> 'We'll keep evolving the GS… ensuring it stays relevant for years to come'

HOW BIG IS THE SCENE?

'In 1979 I set off to Morocco on a Norton Commando 850 with a dodgy layshaft bearing,' says Alun Davies, founder of the ABR (Adventure Bike Rider) Festival. 'By just south of Paris I was on my third bearing and thought "I can't go on any further", so came back. That was the start of my adventure travelling.

'By the mid-Noughties me and my mates were riding adventure bikes. They had the performance, the versatility, the comfort, and the promise: "If you buy me, I'll take you round the world if you want."

'You get to a certain age, and you touch mortality. In other words, if you don't do it now, when the f*** are you going to do it? I've said that to so many people and they've replied "f*** it, I'm going to buy a GS, I'm off to the Alps!". People of that certain age get this as soon as I say it.

'The idea was always there for a festival. There was nowhere for us to go because the only bike rallies treated you like sh*t. In the past you had to sleep in cow dung and eat a dodgy burger in the corner. I went to Reading Festival in 1977 and I'm still emotionally scarred from the toilets.

'We'd been running smaller rallies but once you go over that 500 [people] mark everything changes… so I thought "let's do it". I thought grade A venue so went to see Ragley Hall and Blenheim Palace – we spent more on toilets and showers than any other festival in the UK. Then the industry started to come en masse…

'The growth really is from 2019, because that's when we said "right, we're going for it". It's now capped at 17,500 [people] and is sold out every year. In 10 years' time, hopefully, people will still be going to the ABR.

'I'm delighted we could supply the motorbike customer with such a great experience… and I think the festival gives the motorcycling industry a fantastic opportunity to give young people a window into the world of motorcycling.'

Growth of the ABR Festival

First rally

Takota Camping, Cumbria

April 2011

80 people

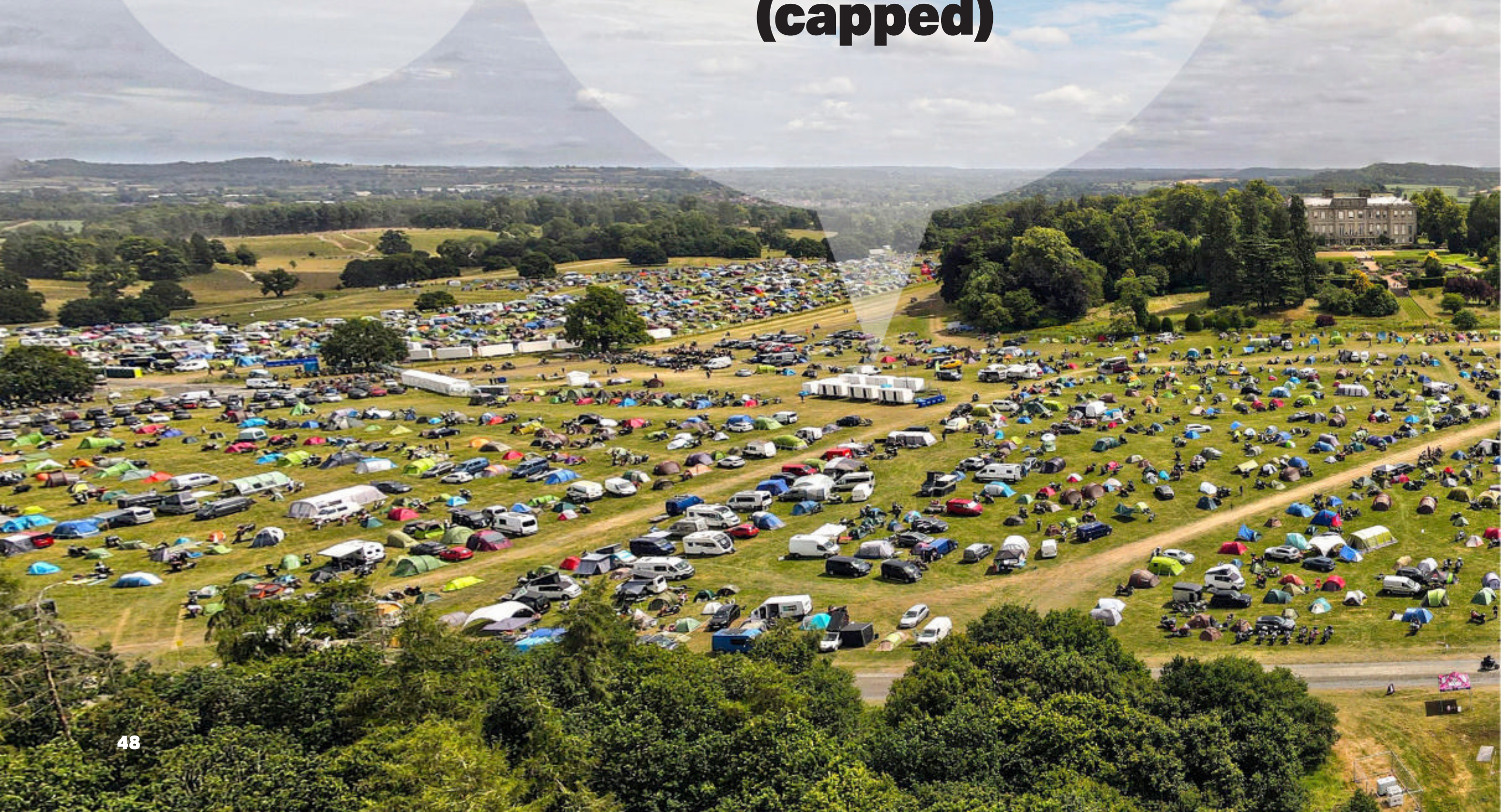
Most recent festival

Ragley Hall, Warks

June 2024

17,500 people

(capped)



ABR Festival, Ragley Hall: the rags-to-riches rise of the adventure bike all in one event

Round Europe on two cylinders, not a knee

What's the attraction?

'I did the classic red-blooded male twenty-something thing of buying the fastest bikes I could,' says **Roger Tysoe**. 'I'd have rather walked than be seen on a bike that had a top box.

'When I turned 34 the penny dropped. Pulling away, first gear, second, third… nope, roll off, that's three figures and a ban. And that's a pothole, and that's a line of traffic.

'Then I loaded my GSX-R750 into a van and went to Anglesey for two days, sleeping in a van. The first three sessions were lost to wind and rain. Day two was good but a guy binned his R6 in front of me, red flag, session canned. On the long trundle home to Lincolnshire I calculated the cost: van, track time, fuel, tyres, food, etc. I could do two laps of the NC500 for the same, or go and see a bit of Europe…

'In February 2018 I was looking at a VFR800 in the local Honda dealer. My better half sat on the pillion of an Africa Twin with panniers and a top box, and said: "You're having this one." I knew that was that. Zero per cent finance sealed the deal.

'Potholes, what potholes? A week's commuting on one fill-up, comfort in spades, loads of torque, engine braking… I liked this new world – and I haven't looked back.'

No one said it has to be...

Changing tastes and the BMW explosion caused a surge of pie-wanting rivals. Fitting semi-knobblies, a beak and robust-looking luggage to a big motor is no guarantee of a German-rivalling machine – but for the confident and far-sighted there are alternative, affordable ways to do the big adventure thing without those two letters…

Aprilia ETV1000 Caponord (2001-2004)

» Born from Ivano Beggio's ambitious bid to make Aprilia 'Europe's Honda', the Caponord was the final spin-off of the Rotax V-twin used in the RSV and Falco. Rushed development led to a so-so detuned motor (98bhp), soft forks and poor build quality, and contributed to Aprilia's collapse and the Piaggio takeover. However, the Capo' is comfy, ride quality is good, and the motor is apocalypse-proof. It can give bargain adventure-touring – accessorised low-mile bikes with the niggles fixed start at under £2k.

Buell XB12XT Ulysses (2005-2009)

» Bandwagon-jumping version of Buell's XB12 Lightning, with tall suspension, high front mudguard and adventure stance. And no off-road ability. Suffered from a crude build and some iffy finishes and the 1202cc old-school Harley engine gave a character not to all tastes. But the later XT is decent: quality is better, shorter suspension restores Buell's usual ace handling, and it has panniers, a top box, a power socket… think left-field roadster with adventure styling. Prices from £4500 – if that's not as cheap as you expected, it's because owners bond with them.

Moto Guzzi Stelvio (2008-2016)

» Along with its touring sister, the Norge, this was peak Guzzi trying to be BMW. Quality was great, handling was secure and inspiring, the engine was impressive… well, for a Guzzi. But it tried too hard to be a GS; instead of doing their own thing, Guzzi tried to make an Italian BMW… and failed. Time to revisit it, though. Yes, the GS has more performance, but as a comfy, engaging, capable, characterful adventure tourer it has real appeal. Minters from £4k (but pay more for a bells-and-whistles NTX).

'We spent more on toilets and showers than any other festival – then the industry started to come en masse…'

‘You get home from the TT and you want to slit your throat’

Brothers **Ben and Tom Birchall** were the kings of sidecar TT racing for almost a decade. They talk skilled lunacy, high-speed ballet and post-TT comedowns

By **Mat Oxley** Photography **Isle of Man TT, RAC**

The Oxley interview

Mat is a TT winner, endurance racer, author and MotoGP paddock insider

There is no madder motorsport than sidecar racing. You spend tens of thousands of pounds designing and building an inherently unstable racing vehicle and then you put not one but two racers on top of it. The driver is in charge of the throttle, the brakes and the handlebars; the passenger's job is to prevent the whole thing from turning upside down.

Then, if you're really away with the fairies, you take your outfit to the Isle of Man and hurl it at full speed down bumpy, twisty country lanes, threading the eye of the needle between drystone walls and hedges at 170mph.

Think about that… if riding a 200-horsepower superbike around the 37.73-mile course seems like a terrifying prospect, imagine trying to control a 140-horsepower three-wheeler that doesn't want to go in a straight line.

This is how Ben and Tom Birchall have spent much of their lives, with some considerable success.

The brothers won 14 sidecar TTs between 2014 and 2023, going unbeaten for seven straight years. They also hold the three-wheeler lap record, which they last broke in 2023, when they became the first sidecar pairing to break the 120mph barrier. That's some speed for 350kg of man and machine powered by a little Honda CBR600 engine.

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High fives as Ben and Tom cruise into the paddock after another TT victory. The brothers won every Sidecar race between 2017-23

The duo pogoing their way through Barregarrow in 2019. Looks lairy, but it turns out two-wheeling is also faster

‘It’s not right, is it?’ grins big brother Ben, the man in charge of the handlebars. ‘Sidecars are just so unstable. One wheel drives, another wheel steers and the third wheel doesn’t do anything other than bounce around. Then you add two skilled lunatics and off you go!’

But be sure of this – anyone who attacks the TT like a madman is only going to end up one way.

‘You have to be brave but if you’re too brave the TT is going to have you,’ adds Ben, 46. ‘So you’ve got to contain your bravery, your lunacy and your aggression and turn it into something.

‘The biggest challenge is that everywhere is blind, so you need to know the circuit better than any other circuit. Plus it’s so fast, so you’ve got to be ultra-confident and ultra-sure of yourself when you go into a corner in sixth gear. You can’t see the exit, but you know you’ve got to come out the other side.

‘That’s the TT – the “ballsiness” and the knowledge you need. The handlebars take a lot of holding on to, plus I can steer the sidecar with my body, but in some parts of the course you’re having a scrap with the thing – it wants to bite you.’

The secret to the brothers’ TT successes isn’t only skill and lunacy, it’s understanding the physics of what they’re doing. They’ve got three big, fat slicks on the road, so they reduce the rolling resistance of the tyres by turning their three-wheeler into a two-wheeler.

‘There’s a photo of us coming down Bray Hill, with the sidecar wheel about two millimetres off the ground,’ says younger sibling Tom, 37. ‘That’s perfect, because we’re two-wheeling, not scrubbing off speed with the third wheel.’

‘I’ve never even talked about this with a rival competitor!’ adds Ben. ‘Friction is a huge thing, that’s where we’ve had an advantage.’

Most of the time, anyway, because the brothers have had many near misses at the TT. ‘Tom has come back with dock leaves in his visor and grass in his arse!’ laughs Ben.

They’ve also had a few disasters. In 2012 they crashed after running out of road at Brandywell and had to be airlifted to hospital. ‘We were very lucky to get away with that one,’ says Ben.

> **‘One wheel drives, another wheel steers and the third wheel bounces around. Then you add two skilled lunatics and off you go!’**

ISLE OF MAN
FUELLED BY
MONSTER
ENERGY
3 WHEELING
BUILT WITH Kevlar
Steadp

Winning at the TT didn’t get any less special for the brothers, even after the 14th time

Their next crash, two years later at Black Dub, hurt even more. Surgeons considered amputating three fingers from Ben’s mangled right hand, but finally the injury was fixed with plates and wires.

They both know they’ve been lucky – four of the last six competitors to lose their lives at the TT were sidecar racers. Therefore, you’d think that Ben and Tom would return home from the TT thanking the gods they’re still alive. Erm, not quite.

‘You don’t get home jumping through hoops, you get home and you want to slit your throat,’ says Ben. ‘You just want to wake up and do it again and again and again. It’s an absolute drug.’

‘You’ve been operating for two weeks at this sky-high level, then you get home and you have to be a normal person again,’ adds Tom. ‘It’s a dopamine crash, a chemical imbalance.

‘What you get at the TT you don’t get anywhere else: that amount of concentration, that amount of accuracy, that amount of skill. You’ve got to be razor-sharp for an hour – it’s that dopamine thing – you’re alive, absolutely alive.

‘It’s like licking a nine-volt battery [simultaneously licking the positive and negative terminals]. You know you shouldn’t but you know you’re going to get a buzz out of it.’

Sidecar racing on the Isle of Man isn’t only a dopamine fix – it’s also a highly choreographed ballet and an exercise in preventing mutually assured destruction.

‘Ben’s got hold of the throttle and I’ve got to help him steer the bike,’ explains Tom. ‘We always have debriefs and if I ask him why he’s struggling through a particular corner and he says it’s because he

No cricks as they navigate the Gooseneck in 2019

can't turn the bike, I'll try something different there next time. You work together – that's the point of sidecar racing.

'If the bike gets sent off-line by a bump at somewhere like the bottom of Barregarrow [a hellishly bumpy 140mph left-hander], it'll come across half a metre and that's enough to wipe out my hip out and it's game over.

'There are lots of dynamics at play. First, we're both really competitive and we're competitive with each other, so you push each other along. Another is that I want to see my brother win and he wants to see his brother win, which helped get us where we've got to.

'And there's one more – I want my brother to be safe, so I've got to be the best at what I do.'

Ben and Tom enjoyed their first years as driver and passenger far away from the Isle of Man – hooning around the local roads of Nottinghamshire in an old Ford Escort.

'When I was 17, Tom was just kid,' recalls Ben. 'He was sat next to me in the Escort all through us doing stuff we shouldn't have been doing, having a craic. It all went from there.'

'The best was when it was snowing,' Tom laughs. 'Burying the car in a hedge, digging it out and going again!'

When Ben was 18 he bought a Honda CBR600. This was the next stage in their partnership.

'I was only eight stone,' Ben recalls. 'So with eight-year-old Tom on the back of the CBR it made the bike sit down and handle perfect. We got up to all sorts – nothing was too much for him.'

Showing Tom Daley how to hold the pike position. Such bendiness is also vital for hanging off a Sidecar

Ben and Tom Birchall CV

Born Ben 21 January 1977 **Tom** 23 December 1986
Live: Mansfield, Notts

- » **2009** Sidecar world champions
- » **2011** Sidecar TTs 7th & 5th
- » **2012** Sidecar TTs 2nd & 3rd
- » **2013** Sidecar TTs DNF & 1st
- » **2014** Sidecar TTs DNF & DNS
- » **2015** Sidecar TTs 1st & 1st
- » **2016** Sidecar TTs DNF & 1st, Sidecar world champions
- » **2017** Sidecar TTs 1st & 1st
- » **2018** Sidecar TTs 1st & 1st, Sidecar world champions
- » **2019** Sidecar TTs 1st & 1st
- » **2022** Sidecar TTs 1st & 1st
- » **2023** Sidecar TTs 1st & 1st

'We didn't think about it then,' Tom adds. 'But looking back now, the trust was building, we were working each other out, creating that relationship.'

Ben wanted to race motorcycles, rather than sidecars, but he didn't have the cash. 'I wanted to do solos, but the cheapest, easiest way into the paddock was as a passenger,' he says.

'The first race meeting I did I was having a slash in the toilets at Darley Moor and this other passenger says: "Who you riding with?" I said: "Dave Holden." He went: "Oh!"

'Dave was a wild man from Blackburn – long greasy hair, smoked, drank like a fish, didn't wash, but went like stink on the track. Before he taught me to ride the bike he taught me to drink and smoke.

'Tom used to come with us to watch and help out. It was an almost unspoken thing that when I started driving a sidecar he was going to be my passenger.'

The brothers first raced together in 2003, when Tom was 17. They started out on short circuits, getting to know each other's racing ways. Six years later they won their first sidecar world championship and have since won two more, making them some of Britain's most successful world-class motorcycle racers of the past two decades.

Both are skilled engineers, which has played a huge part in their success, because more engineering happens in sidecar racing than in any other bike racing category, apart from Grands Prix. Sidecars are

> 'You operate for two weeks at this sky-high level, then get home and have to be a normal person again – it's a dopamine crash'

50? Whatever. They're trying to lap the Mountain Course at 120mph – and they achieved the feat in 2023

As road riders it's hard to imagine what lapping on a Superbike feels like. But this is another step on again

genuine prototypes, tailored for the racetrack from the ground up, unlike road-based Superbike and Supersport machines that dominate grids around the world.

The Birchalls use a special sidecar at the TT based on a chassis made by Swiss constructor Louis Christen Racing (LCR), which has dominated sidecar racing for decades.

'I sit over the engine, instead of in front of the engine,' explains Ben. 'And we've laid the engine on its front, with the cylinders parallel to the ground.

'That put thirty kilos of weight closer to the ground and I sit around thirty centimetres lower than before, so the bike is a lot lower than normal, which also helps with the aerodynamics.'

Although Tom talks of his career in the present, he is actually retired. He decided he'd had enough of rolling the dice after their record-breaking 2023 TT.

'I was always dead honest with myself,' he says. 'Every year I never just walked into the TT blind. I'd go for a mountain-bike ride on my own, clear my head and ask myself, are you ready to commit to this? And I'd always said, yes. But after last year's TT I asked myself and I couldn't say it.

'On a 120mph lap the bike is doing different things in places you'd never expect. There were bits where I was sat there thinking – please, just thread it through, just thread it through. When those thoughts start creeping into your head it's time to stop, you've done enough.

'The final two laps of last year's second sidecar race were the most sublime, surreal experience I've ever had on a bike – doing that 120mph lap, getting cheered on in the sunshine. We pulled into the winner's enclosure and I just thought, this is it, this is as good as it'll ever get and it just felt like the right time. I've got good memories and I'm glad it happened, not sad that it's stopped.'

Ben, however, didn't want it to stop. He chose Frenchman Kevin Rousseau to replace his brother and the Anglo-French pairing took a strong second-place finish in this year's second sidecar TT.

'Kevin is good but he's not a Tom,' says Ben. 'We did some short circuits and it felt good, then we got to the TT… and that showed me how good Tom was. I had to change the set-up of the bike massively, so I now have more input than the passenger.'

If the 2024 TT was weird for Ben, what was it like for Tom? No dopamine fix for him…

'I went to the TT launch in April, thinking, what have I done and what am I doing here, I don't belong here anymore,' he says. 'I had an identity crisis. Then I signed my [TT commentary] contract with Greenlight TV and that was the start of the recovery process, because I had a purpose again.'

Ben will most likely continue with Rousseau in 2025, despite a recent mountain-bike accident which had him helicoptered to hospital where surgeons inserted two titanium rods in his spine.

He was still suffering from those injuries in September when the brothers were presented the Segrave Trophy at London's swanky Royal Automobile Club. This super-prestigious trophy is awarded in memory of 1920s car racer and record-breaker Sir Henry Segrave to racers and other adventurers for 'outstanding demonstrations of skill, courage and initiative'. Previous winners include Joey Dunlop, Geoff Duke, Carl Fogarty, Mike Hailwood, Lewis Hamilton, John McGuinness, Stirling Moss, Barry Sheene, John Surtees and fellow three-wheeler Steve Webster.

The Birchalls have entered the pantheon. Quite right, too. Bike

Huge skill, courage and initiative. Well deserved, too. Ben (left) and Tom with the Segrave Trophy. Don't they scrub up well…

NEXT ISSUE **Fabio Di Giannantonio** discusses his roller-coaster ride to the top of MotoGP

BARE ESS

Stripped back but packing every must-have feature, the **Yamaha MT-09**, **Triumph Street Triple 765 R** and **KTM 990 Duke** could just offer the perfect roadster package. Engaging high-value motorcycling is this way…

By **Jim Moore** Photography **Adam Shorrock**

Grab a scrap of paper and a pen, and jot down the ingredients for a tasty road-focused sporting motorcycle. It'll need easy-access torque and quick-fire thrills – so that's an eager twin or flexible three-cylinder engine. Just over 100bhp is plenty. We'd want it to be slim and light, because mass and bulk are the enemy of handling and agility, with the reassurance of modern plush-yet-taut suspension and single-finger braking. The riding position should be engaging yet with enough comfort for the daily blast to work, with a smear of practicality without going so far as hinting at humdrum. Smattering of useful rider aids, please. Oh, and priced smack in the middle of the market so the value-o-meter is right round the dial.

Triumph have played this game with the Street Triple for almost 17 years, and while the blingtastic RS is the best-selling version this R could just be better value. It's got challenging opposition, though. KTM have retired the funky 890 Duke and replaced it with a funkier 990 version, and Yamaha updated the evergreen MT-09 for this year, the latest version promising to be better than ever. We take this trio out for two days on all manner of British roads to find the leading road-focused sporty naked…

SENTIALS

Street Triple 765 R, 990 Duke, MT-09. No nude awakening with these three...

Pay for your Duke 990

Examples

» CASH PRICE:
£12,999 on the road
» PCP:
Deposit £3300, 36 monthly payments £149.55, optional final payment £6592.50 (4000 miles, 9.4% APR, total £15,276.30)
» HP:
Deposit £3300, 36 months £308.51, total £14,406.36 (9.4% APR)

KTM 990 Duke

Punchy, slender, lots of widgets, looks like nothing else. Wave nicely at the finest 'mid-sized' Duke to date

Above: shouts 'KTM' even with such little orange

Left: nicer than the Dukes of yore

Below: why do the twiddlers bring so much joy?

Jimmy Doherty is all wide-eyed and animated. I can see him in the MT-09's mirrors. We've stopped to swap bikes, in a lay-by just outside Leicester, following a riotous B-road fling from *Bike*'s Cambridgeshire base. His face full-beam, he gesticulates excitedly to fellow tester and man-sized rodent Jon Urry who's pulled up alongside him on the Street Triple R. Little wonder Jimmy's so animated – he's been riding KTM's new 990 Duke.

Jon, who pinched the KTM's keys last night for a long ride home, shares Jimmy's delight at the Austrian twin. 'This 990 is the most competent, hysterical and agile B-road blaster that I've ever ridden,' he states once Jimmy's stopped gibbering. 'It's just bonkers, but in a really good way.'

The KTM has this effect on whoever swings a leg over it; long-time *Bike* bloke Paul Lang did a long-term test on one earlier this year, and it got him equally fizzed up. And we've now found it has the ingredients to still feel exciting even in today's esteemed company (the Yamaha and Triumph, not my follow testers).

KTM's 947cc parallel twin produces 121bhp and 76 lb.ft of grunt, weighs less than 195kg juiced (179kg dry), and puts all that to the ground through a stiff yet lightweight tubular steel chassis connected to WP APEX suspension. While KTM could have gone a notch or two higher in terms of suspension spec – the 990's forks lack preload adjustment and there's no compression refinement at the rear – the level of feedback, confidence and damping control fed back through the chassis to your hands, feet and posterior is seriously impressive. And being a KTM, the 990 has bite and a mischievous attitude that encourages full use of its potential at every available opportunity.

It's the same deal with the brakes. Up front KTM-branded four-pots with lean-sensitive ABS chomp down on 300mm discs, while a single-pot caliper and 240mm disc (with the option to disable ABS, supermoto style) take care of things at the rear. Nothing fancy, no Italian brand names, yet all the power, feel and feedback required to match the belting chassis and motor.

Ah, yes, the motor. It's a heavily reworked version of the old 889cc LC8 unit, bored and stroked by 1.8mm and 1.6mm respectively to give 947cc (shouldn't it be a 950, then?), producing nine extra bhp and 8 lb.ft more torque. On the road that equates to the sort of oomph that'll see a four-car A-road overtake executed in a mere twist of the throttle, and off-corner grunt that has the Bridgestone Battlax S22 rear tyre earning its keep off every turn.

> **'Proper sportsbike in naked roadster's clothes… you expect that with a KTM'**

'It's really exciting to ride,' reckons Jimmy once he's able to distil his exuberant hand movements into words. 'Almost aggressive at times, but you expect that with a KTM. To me, it's a proper sportsbike in a naked roadster's clothes and more focused than the Yamaha. Only the Triumph gets close in terms of chassis feel and performance.'

Not that the 990's wearing much. What bodywork there is, is sharp, minimalist, angular and aggressive. Just looking at it, you know it means business. Pillions barely get a look in – at least I think that's what the pad at the back's for – and only the 5in TFT dash saves your neck from high-speed windblast, so two-up runs and long distance aren't really the 990's bag. Epic Sunday morning blasts and fast group track sessions, however…

So, it's a hoot to ride, betters the old 890 in every regard, and will even potter about town to a degree if you so wish. But top-level tomfoolery comes at a price. The 990 Duke starts at £12,999; that's £2704 more than the Triumph and £2893 harder on the pocket than the almost-as-powerful MT-09.

If that's not salty enough, you need to fork out an additional £887 for the Tech Pack to unlock the Track and Performance modes (and you'd want to, given the Duke's feisty nature) as well as the adjustability levels on the electronics' safety assists, enable cruise control, the up/down quickshifter, launch control (really..?) and more. Oh, and phone connectivity costs an extra £135 on top. With that lot added on you're looking at over £14,000 for a bike competing against others in the £10-£12k bracket.

If the Tech Pack and smartphone compatibility were included in the initial price I'd be tempted to say 'go orange'. But for now, I'll reserve judgement until I've done further miles on the other two…

Pay for your Street Triple R

Example

» CASH PRICE:
£10,295 on the road
» PCP:
Deposit £3200, 36 monthly payments £83.26, optional final payment £5388 (4000 miles, 6.9% APR, total £11,585.36)
» HP:
Deposit £3200, 37 months £212.50, total £11,072.50 (6.9% APR)

Above: bit crisper than the old twin round spotlights...

Left: the least flashy here, but works okay

Right: yes, it's fully adjustable, but you won't need to play

Triumph Street Triple 765 R

R for Road, Renowned, and Reputation. And for Really Ruddy Righteous

Let's leave the bush unbeaten: I like Triumph's Street Triple R. A lot. We all do. In this company the plucky Brit (with a Thai passport, obviously…) might be at a disadvantage in terms of cubic capacity, but side by side with the better-endowed 990 Duke and MT-09, the 765 R doesn't flounder in their wake.

All that's required when I jump off the Duke or MT-09 on to the Triumph is a willingness to let the 765cc mill spin a little longer in each gear to access its full 118bhp (peak power's at 11,500rpm) before snicking up a cog – hardly a chore when the exhaust emits such a glorious howl – and I'm immediately in the Street Triple zone again.

In fact, hopping on board the 765 R is like slipping into an old, comfy pair of slippers, if that analogy doesn't damage the bike's credibility too much. For me, the riding position is perfect. Just enough forward lean for when the urge to boogie is strong, yet comfortable and natural over a 250-mile trek. On that basis alone, it's ticking boxes.

'What always impresses me about the Triumph,' says Jon, who has ridden countless Street Triples over the years, 'is its ability to be a brilliant road bike – comfortable, easy-going, good in pretty much all situations – without sacrificing the fact that it's also a really capable sportsbike.

'The RS model costs more and has better suspension, but it's no better on the road. And up against these two, the Street Triple only

really loses out in terms of midrange torque – peak power is pretty much the same. Oh, and it's a bit buzzy when cruising.'

It is, but a couple of teeth off the rear sprocket would go a long way to calming its motorway manners without hurting overall performance. 'Sport' is the engine's most engaging mode and during our tenure that's pretty much where the 765 stays. Were the going a little more relaxed I might opt for 'Road', or even 'Rain' should the heavens open. But for now at least, I prefer the electronics in their sporty set-up.

There's plenty of scope to adjust the suspension, too. It's fully tweakable – Showa BFF BP forks up front; Showa shock at the rear – and provides a decent balance between damping performance, control and ride quality. Stability is rock solid, even over poor-quality surfaces.

'You can feel the difference after riding the Yamaha,' says Jimmy. 'The MT is softer and slightly skittish, even wallowy at times. This feels much more controlled and precise, but without being overly stiff. Lovely steering too; really accurate and easy to turn. And on the brakes, I'd say it's the best of the bunch with bags of feel and power.'

That'll be the four-pot fancily titled Brembos, which are indeed magnificent. But unlike Jimmy I'm not so keen on the low-speed steering. Above 30mph it's fine, but below that it feels a tad laboured, dropping into slow turns rather than rolling through. I think it's the tyres though, so improvement should be possible. The turning circle could also be better, especially if you're caught in a tight spot in town.

Issues with the Street Triple R are minor, however, and as an overall package this three-cylinder Triumph shines. Unlike with the 990 Duke, you don't have to pay extra for additional modes. Cornering-sensitive ABS, traction and wheelie control, plus an excellent up/down quickshifter all come as standard. The clocks – a part TFT, part LCD display – may not be as up-to-the-minute as the KTM's dash, but they're a million times easier to live with than the more expensive RS model's appalling instruments. And that's a significant win for the R.

> **'Packs sportsbike excitement without the discomfort and impracticality'**

Buying a Street Triple R is a big win, too. It packs all the excitement and thrill of a sportsbike without the discomfort and impracticality of low clip-on 'bars. Its three-cylinder motor – a version of which powers the Moto2 grid – kicks out more smiles per cee-cee than pretty much any other unit on the market. And at a sniff over 10 grand on the road (less than £85 per month on a PCP deal with a 20 per cent deposit), this immensely enjoyable middleweight is well within reach of most pockets.

Yamaha MT-09

It's always had one of the greatest engines of all time. Now it's been updated the rest of it is pretty ruddy great too…

Most bikes that have seen a single major overhaul in a decade can feel a bit, well… stale. Not so the MT-09. Ten years in, this three-pot gem has lost none of its effervescent sparkle or ability to engage and excite. It's a feel-good motorcycle that's still very much at the top of its game.

Frequent subtle tweaks (as well as a complete redesign in 2021) have kept the MT fresh. Recent updates include 'acoustic amplifier grilles' atop the tank to accentuate the airbox's intake howl; two extra customisable riding modes on top of Sport, Street and Rain settings; a third-generation quickshifter that allows clutchless downshifts while accelerating as well as upshifts while slowing; slicker switchgear with self-cancelling indicators; and a six-axis IMU to control a host of electronic trickery.

It's all good stuff, but what always shines through with the MT-09 is how well it rides.

'I could happily live with one of these,' pipes Jimmy after a couple of hours on its firm yet adequate saddle. 'It's so easy and natural to ride, yet when you tap into that motor it goes from good to glorious. There's drive from pretty much any revs and it keeps building like an immense wave. For the roads we ride, it's simply brilliant.

'Oh, and that sound. You don't need an aftermarket pipe – that induction roar makes the hairs on the back of my neck stand to attention every time.'

The MT-09's riding position is a little less serious than those of the Triumph and KTM, but slightly higher 'bars and more relaxed 'peg positioning make the Yamaha ripe for chucking into B-road bends or whipping between traffic in town. Indeed Yamaha have tweaked the MT-09's ergonomics for 2024, positioning the 'bars slightly lower (tweakable through two additional settings) and making the 'peg position adjustable.

Ride quality is a tad more forgiving than the others too; it's a softer, floatier package than the Duke or Street Triple, but without sacrificing what's still a sporty roadster at heart. Yamaha label the MT-09 as a 'hyper naked', which describes it to a tee.

'I like the fact the MT-09 can get a bit flighty,' chirps Jon, 'because it never breaks into anything alarming. Yes, the 'bars flap a bit over rough surfaces when you're on it, and on a track the KTM's firmer set-up and the Triumph's sportier chassis would leave the Yamaha struggling to hold on, but for most road riding scenarios the MT is ace.

'If I was going to put in some miles it's the one I'd pick – and it's arguably the easiest to live with day to day.'

> **'It's a feel-good motorcycle that's still very much at the top of its game'**

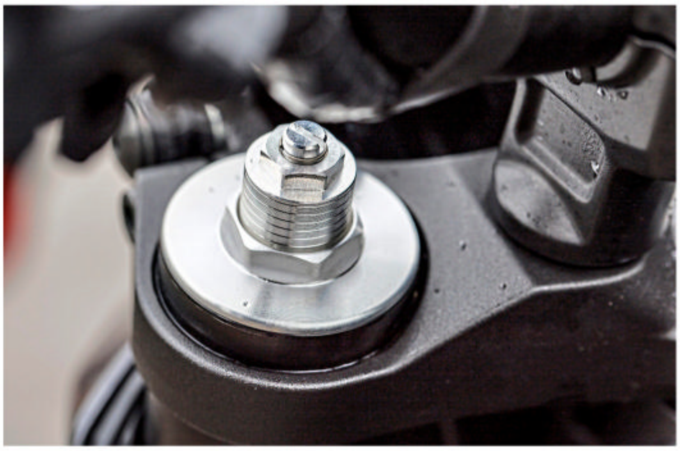
That's why owners love the MT-09. It's an impressive all-rounder with enough character and edge to always make the long way home more appealing. What it's not, however, is a bike you'd open the garage door to, mug of tea in hand, and gaze at with pride. To look at, the MT-09 is a challenge – offensive even, from some angles. There are no side panels, the front light arrangement looks like a child's Transformers toy, and the underslung exhaust wouldn't look out of place hanging from the rafters in Kwik Fit.

But every time I jump aboard I'm treated to that glorious CP3 engine, immense two-finger-touch brakes, and such an engaging ride that I couldn't care less what it looks like; the reward is so much greater than the MT's dubious aesthetics.

The MT-09 may be a model with a 10-year lineage, but it's been part of Yamaha's range for that long for good reason. It's a brilliant bike with a fabulous engine and a character that works for most riders most of the time. KTM's 990 Duke may be the new kid on the block, but there's certainly life in the MT-09 yet – especially at almost three grand keener than its Austrian rival.

Right: headlight and cowl from the *Dr Who* set

Left: get joy from a joystick? You'll find it joyous



Below: careful with that flat-blade, now

Pay for your Yam MT-09

Examples

» CASH PRICE:
£10,106 on the road
» PCP:
Deposit £3200, 36 monthly payments £95.43, optional final payment £5152.50 (4000 miles, 9.4% APR, total £11,787.98)
» HP:
Deposit £3200, 36 months £219.67, total £11,108.12 (9.4% APR)

Verdict

KTM's new 990 Duke is a blast. A proper in-ya-face, full commitment sportsbike that just happens not to have a fairing or clip-ons. But that was to be expected; the Austrian marque doesn't make dull or characterless bikes. Purely in terms of its ride and feel the 990 has raised the bar for all future contenders to the class. In outright performance it's very much shoulder to shoulder with the MT-09 in terms of bottom-end stomp and midrange punch, while at the top end it's just got the edge on the Street Triple.

It'll do day-to-day as well. Perhaps not quite as convincingly or compliantly as the Triumph or Yamaha, but there's a usable soft side beneath the Duke's muscular exterior. But the KTM's awesomeness comes at a price. Starting at £12,999 and rising to an eye-watering £14,021 once equipped with the options it should have standard, the Duke's price point becomes very hard to justify in this company. Great bike, just not at that price. Maybe wait until later next year when KTM start selling off 2024 models at a knock-down price…

Yamaha's updated MT-09 makes much more sense. Starting at a way more palatable £10,106 yet delivering 90% of the KTM's thrills as well as being easier to live with, Yam's roadster triple also makes more sense to a wider range of buyers, we'd wager. It'll commute, tour (maybe fit a mini fairing…), scratch and be much easier to ride than the KTM when you're not in the mood – all for a fat wedge less cash. Indeed, even the Öhlins-shod MT-09 SP is more than a grand cheaper than the Duke.

However, our cash would go on the Street Triple R. As an overall package it's the best of the KTM and Yamaha rolled into one, with the added treat of aesthetic appeal and genuine race pedigree. The Triumph's sportsbike soul is unmistakable – as blatant as the KTM's yet complemented by a ride quality that's perfect for British roads, comfort that'll see out a 250-mile ride with ease, a finish that lifts the package above most other middleweights into more exotic territory, all at a price that's right on the, er… money.

'Triumph is best of KTM and Yamaha rolled into one, with treat of added aesthetic appeal'

SPECIFICATIONS	KTM 990 DUKE	TRIUMPH STREET TRIPLE 765 R	YAMAHA MT-09
Contact	ktm.com/en-gb	triumphmotorcycles.co.uk	yamaha-motor.eu/gb
Price (on the road)	£12,999	£10,295	£10,106
Capacity	947cc	765cc	890cc
Engine	8v DOHC parallel twin	12v DOHC inline triple	12v DOHC inline triple
Bore x stroke	92.5 x 70.4mm	78 x 53.4mm	78 x 62.1mm
Transmission	6-speed, chain	6-speed, chain	6-speed, chain
Power (claimed)	121bhp @ 9500rpm	118bhp @ 11,500rpm	117bhp @ 10,000rpm
Torque (claimed)	76 lb.ft @ 6750rpm	59 lb.ft @ 8500rpm	69 lb.ft @ 7000rpm
Top speed	140mph	139mph	140mph
Frame	tubular steel trellis	aluminium beam	cast aluminium diamond
Front suspension	43mm usd forks, adjustable rebound and compression damping	41mm usd forks, adjustable preload, rebound and compression damping	41mm usd forks, adjustable preload, rebound and compression damping
Rear suspension	monoshock, adjustable preload and rebound damping	monoshock, adjustable preload, rebound and compression damping	monoshock, adjustable preload and rebound damping
Brakes (f/r)	2 x 300mm discs, 4-pot calipers / 240mm disc, 1-pot caliper	2 x 310mm discs, 4-pot calipers / 220mm disc, 1-pot caliper	2 x 298mm discs, 4-pot calipers / 245mm disc, 1-pot caliper
Tyres (f/r)	120/70 R17 / 180/55 R17	120/70 ZR17 / 180/55 ZR17	120/70 ZR 17 / 180/55 ZR17
Rake/trail	24.2°/99mm	23.7°/97.8mm	24.4°/108mm
Wheelbase	1476mm	1402mm	1430mm
Weight	194kg (wet)	189kg (wet)	193kg (kerb)
Seat height	825mm	826mm	825mm
Tank size	14.8 litres	15 litres	14 litres
Economy	47.7mpg	48.5mpg	49mpg
Electronics	cornering ABS, traction control, wheelie control. With Tech Pack: launch control, connectivity, cruise control, quickshifter	cornering ABS, traction control, quickshifter, wheelie control	cornering ABS, traction control, wheelie control, quickshifter, connectivity
***Bike* rating**	8/10	9/10	9/10

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HOW HARD

John thought it would be a doddle, but this was a sign of things to come...

PICS: DAVE MACKISON/BMW

CAN IT BE?

Answer: very. BMW's GS Challenge is well organised and welcoming. And bollocking difficult…

By John Westlake

Pay attention at the back: instructor points out the best places to have (another) prang

John's ball handling started off well, but didn't last long

Look up 'delusional' in the dictionary and it says: 'A motorcycle journalist who believes he will cruise through the GS Challenge because he did a trials course two years ago'. I genuinely believed it wouldn't be that difficult. Fool.

The off-road event started in 2008 as a way of selecting the British team who would go on and compete in the GS Trophy – a massive global competition for BMW riders that's been held on the planet's most glamorous dirt locations, from Patagonia to Thailand. That's clearly hardcore, but the UK event I'm at is open to everyone – novices are welcome. Hence my misplaced confidence.

The delusions start crumbling on sight of the first challenge. The aim is to ride an R1300GS round a small, slippy pen while picking up tennis balls from the top of traffic cones with your right hand and then dropping them into a pile of tyres, without ever putting a foot down. 'So you have to ride round full-lock corners on dirt while your throttle hand holds tennis balls?' I ask the BMW man in charge, just to be sure. 'Yes. And you've only got 40 seconds to do it.'

Needless to say my run is a lurching, foot-dabbing, cone-bashing disaster as I utterly fail to steer, balance and manipulate tennis balls. I score maximum penalties within eight seconds. Stupid fricking game. How can anyone do that? The next contender is the only other member of our group who's never done the Challenge before, and he crashes into the barriers. See, impossible.

Then one of the veteran GS Trophy contestants has a go and chugs round on tickover, calmly doing full-lock, one-handed turns while tucking tennis balls into his jacket and then firing them neatly into the tyre receptacle, like some GS-mounted Roger Federer. Barrier-crasher and I desperately want another go to redeem ourselves so we can feel less incompetent, but we're ushered to the next challenge.

A time that rubs salt in John's tennis ball wounds

Like all the others, this is held in Walters Arena, a sprawling 4000-acre patch of Wales on the southern edge of the Brecon Beacons. It's the base for BMW's Off Road Skills operation and is an extraordinary place, with every off-road surface on offer apart from sand. Muddy climbs, rocky trials sections and nadgery forest trails are linked with super-fast gravel tracks that criss-cross the whole park. A more picturesque playground is hard to imagine.

After the tennis ball farrago I'm on the brink of a huff and am considering riding off to explore rather than face further humiliation. But the next challenge looks easier – all you have to do is thrash down a dirt track, skid round a cone and thrash back. Except it's not as easy as it looks because there's not enough width to turn the bike on full lock, so you really do have to skid it round – if you don't carry enough speed to lock the rear, you're in three-point-turn hell.

Luckily I'm not first for this one, so I study Roger Federer's full-bore approach and remind myself that it's not my bike – all the challenges are completed on BMW

‘The event is open to everyone – novices are welcome. Hence my misplaced confidence’

Off Road Skills’ R1300GSs that they use for training, so if I do get it horribly wrong at least I won’t be paying. After only one minor altercation with some metal barriers I cross the line at full chat and beat the allotted time. My Challenge card is marked with its first (and, as it turns out, only) clear round. Halle-bloody-lujah.

Then it all gets trickier, like one of those computer games where every level introduces new realms of weirdness and seems impossible until you play it constantly for three weeks. We pull up at a queue managed by two chipper old ladies who look like they’ve taken the morning off running a tea shop. They explain that the next challenge is in the dark, dank woods in front of us – so dark, in fact, that riders disappear as they enter the thicket and all we hear is muffled shouts and the occasional mad revving as bikes are dropped. Riders emerge on or beside their motorcycles, all being pushed by marshals.

‘How many people have cleaned this one?’ asks Mr Federer. ‘None,’ chirps Mrs Miggins. I ride in and

A brief respite turns to gravel-based joy on the F900GS

immediately see why. It's a slippery hell-hole made up of wet tree roots and loose dirt, with the course requiring numerous full-lock turns around the trees. Amazingly, I manage to get round the first bit with only one dab, managing to ignore mysterious, shadowy goblin figures skulking in the trees.

Then I arrive at a slope. It's not steep, but is criss-crossed with wet roots, has a wicked camber and there's no run-up. And I'm on a 237kg R1300GS. Judging by the number of shadowy figures – probably marshals rather than goblins, on reflection – I know this must be the killer section. Channelling my inner Dougie Napkin [Lampkin you idiot – Ed] I dial in some revs, drop all my weight backwards on to the rear tyre, and feed the clutch out with a dribble of finesse. The GS digs in, bounces over one tree root, churns some mud, hits another root, slides sideways and flops dirt-ward. I prop it up with my right leg then feel the GS magically lift itself upright.

'You did well there,' says the marshal, puffing at the effort of hoiking me and the GS vertical by its luggage rack. 'Did I?' I ask, in dire need of compliments. 'No, not really,' he chortles. 'But at least you didn't drop it like everyone else.'

And so the day continues, with entertainingly dour marshals encouraging, cajoling and picking us up as we blunder our way round the course. In the afternoon we get to repeat the challenges and I start to enjoy myself more as my attempts become less pathetic. And when we get to the dank dark wood I discover they've removed the uphill section and I make it round without stopping. 'That was only nine dabs,' says one of the tea ladies. 'Is that the best so far?" she asks her colleague. 'Oh God no…'

For me, the highlights of the day aren't the challenges, but the miles of deserted gravel tracks between that we all ride on the bikes we turned up on. I'm riding *Bike*'s long term test F900GS, which underwhelmed me during the four-hour ride to Wales, its parallel twin not uncorking adrenaline no matter how miraculously the suspension controls all that travel. It felt capable rather than exciting.

But for fast trail riding it's magnificent, making average riders like me feel Dakar ready. Suddenly the motor's featureless torque plateau makes perfect sense – open the throttle round a third gear corner and the tail slides out so progressively that even I don't feel compelled to slam it shut. Just hold your right hand steady and marvel as you drift out of corner after corner, feet up and grinning. After a while it occurs to me that the Enduro Mode electronics might be helping rein in the engine, so I turn them off and nothing changes. It's all down to that motor.

And the suspension is just as dirt-friendly. On the road the yards of travel feels like overkill, but on bumpy gravel tracks it's a godsend, gliding over minor imperfections and letting you hit chunky rocks and potholes without banging your hands loose from the 'bars. Confidence inspiring? Hell yeah. It feels like a big 450 enduro bike rather than the R1300GS's smaller brother.

Before the end of our final firetrail thrash I've undertaken a mental handbrake turn and gone from wondering what the point of the F900GS is, to wanting one rather badly (along with a 4000-acre playground). Even the noise is better off-road – with walls of trees beside the trails bouncing back the exhaust note, I can appreciate the Akrapovic's bark at the top of the rev range. It's turned from a competent commuter into a wicked-fast trail weapon.

The rain lashes down that evening and all 200 competitors gather in a clearing where the Off Road Skills operation has set up a marquee, bar and street food vendors. As the beer flows – we're camping, so anaesthesia is essential – I'm swept along by everyone's enthusiasm for making a large motorcycle do improbable things on dirt. And it is genuinely astonishing what the R1300GS can achieve; earlier on our group watched slack-jawed as a Dutch chap rode one round an enduro course like it was a 125 motocrosser. It was like Eddie Hall excelling at ballet.

So, would I do another GS Challenge? Heavily refreshed by Welsh beer and swept along by the GS crowd's bonhomie, I briefly consider it. Maybe I should buy a trials bike and practise. But I'm deluding myself again. What I really want to do is go trail riding round Wales on our F900GS… *Bike*

'I'm swept along by everyone's enthusiasm for making a large bike do improbable things on dirt'

Big GS on dirt: not easy. But with practice…
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This is every bit as bothersome and difficult as it looks

That's one way to test if the switchgear is waterproof

Clean clobber, smiling face. Neither lasted

How to ride a big bike on dirt

Ex-Dakar Rallyist Si Pavey manages BMW Off Road Skills and offers some tips...

'Over decades of teaching people to ride GSs off-road, we've discovered the biggest factor is mindset. If you can truly believe that low-speed skills are the foundation of everything else, you're on the right path as then you'll practise them and see dramatic improvements. We all want to jump puddles and do skids, but you can't do those safely and reliably unless you've nailed the foundational skills.

'Firstly, you need to be comfortable with the weight and balance of the bike when it's stationary – being comfortable with one foot on the peg and one on the ground at a standstill, turning the bars when you stop to stabilise the bike... these are simple skills that can make life easier when the bike is moving.

'Every time you lose balance on a heavy bike it's a big job getting it back. It's not like a little bike that you can muscle. A lot of people want to rush through the low-speed balance stage and get to the more exciting stuff. But if you nail the low-speed skills, when the bike is unsettled by a bump or a rut, your default reaction will be the right one.

'Even off-the-bike practice helps – moving the bike around, walking with the bike. It improves your feel for the bike's balance. Then go to a car park and turn around in tight spaces. Those skills set you up well for the more advanced off-road techniques.'

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[Inside] WP

…or, as they're now known, **KTM Components**. *Bike* discovers what it takes to produce up to a million parts a year to feed one of Europe's biggest bike factories

By **Martin Fitz-Gibbons** Photography **KTM**

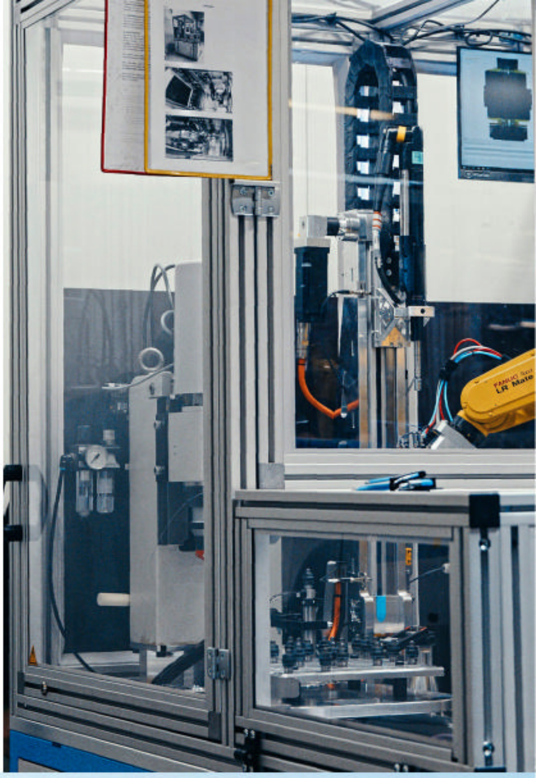
White curly bit on a bright orange background. The brand will never be in question…

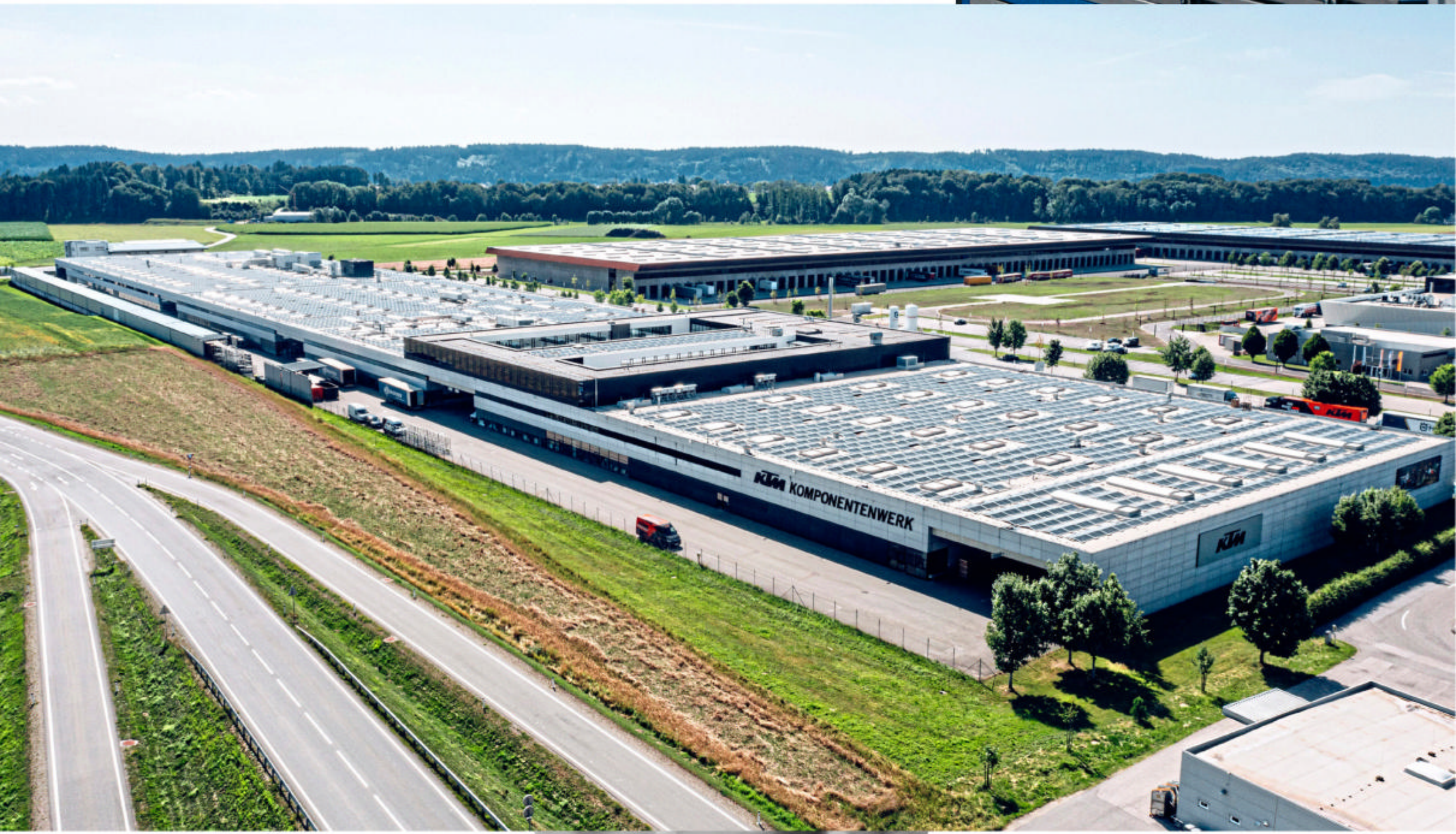
Instantly recognisable from their distinctive white springs, WP were formed in 1977 by Dutch motocross rider Wim Peters. The colour was borne from necessity rather than creativity: white was the only colour available as the coating supplier Wim chose made hospital beds. This happy accident led to the firm's original name of White Power Suspension – later changed to WP for obvious reasons...

By 1983 Wim was supplying suspension to KTM, and the two firms pioneered the first upside-down fork on a production bike (1984 KTM 495 MX). The companies grew closer and won motocross titles together, but in 1991 would both enter bankruptcy and be reborn under new ownership.

A revitalised KTM became a majority shareholder of WP in 1999, and in 2009 all WP production was shifted to Austria. Their remit grew from suspension to include manufacturing frames, exhausts, radiators and oil coolers. In recent years the company has been renamed KTM Components, with the WP brand retained solely for suspension parts.

Today KTM-C builds every frame and exhaust for every KTM, Husqvarna and GasGas motorcycle built in Austria – that's every off-roader as well as every street bike from 890cc up. Given KTM's four assembly lines have the capacity to build around 250,000 motorcycles a year, with almost all taking their frame, exhaust and suspension from here, this single building must be able to produce around a million complete parts every year. And, yes, almost 50 years later they still use white springs.





Location, location, location
The factory is on the outskirts of Munderfing, a small town in Upper Austria. It's on the same site as KTM's engine plant and factory racing department, less than two miles from the firm's HQ and main assembly lines in Mattighofen. KTM have called Mattighofen home since 1934 – it's the 'M' in KTM.

We're not talking about a garden shed here. The KTM-C building is 500 metres long (almost a third of a mile) and has a footprint of 40,000 square metres (10 acres) – it's dizzyingly huge. Around 450 people are employed here, as well as several robots.

Springs can only get better
Up to 200 different models of WP forks and shocks are assembled on site. There are three fork production lines, plus three separate lines for shocks (one for street-bike shocks; one for motocross link shocks; one for KTM's linkage-free PDS enduro shocks). In total there's the capacity to assemble the suspension for up to 1000 bikes a day. Given a set of forks consists of around 300 parts, with around 200 in a shock, that can mean a daily demand of up to half a million individual pieces that need to be picked from the goods-in warehouse and sent to assembly.

AI eyes

Suspension assembly starts with a shim stack, which is done by hand. An order form lists the quantity, thickness and order of shims required, which employees pick and assemble manually. Every finished stack is then checked using artificial intelligence. A robot takes two photos of each stack then uses AI to assess if it's been assembled correctly. This sophisticated system has been entirely developed in-house.

Testing doesn't stop there. Every single component goes through an end-of-line dynamic test. The results are stored permanently and each component is marked with a QR-style identifier. Hand these guys a random KTM fork leg built six years ago and they'll be able to tell you its original test result and how tightly the computer-controlled screwdrivers nipped up the bolts.

From MotoGP to the street

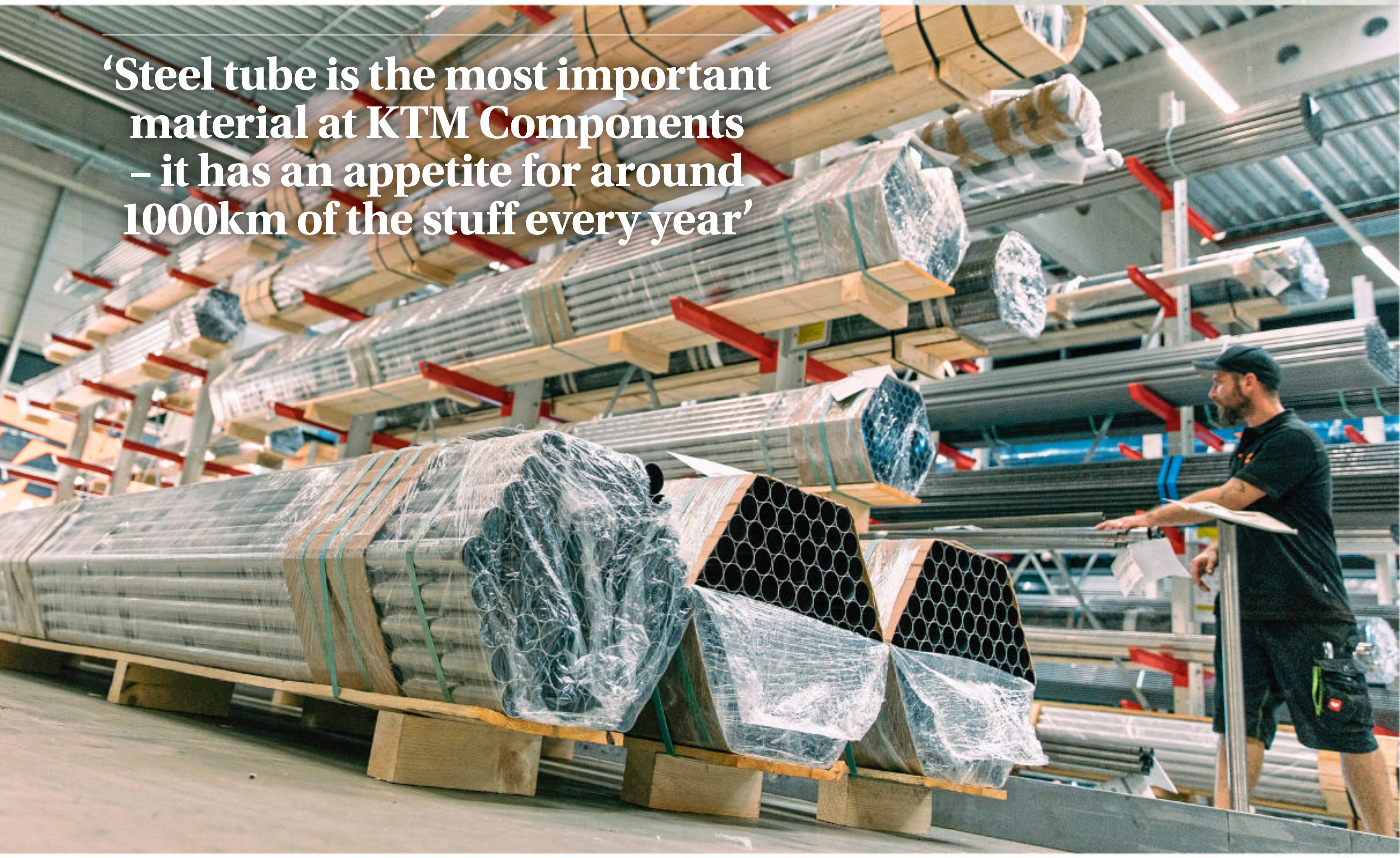
Away from the mass-production suspension lines is the quieter, calmer WP Pro Components assembly room. This is where the firm's ultra-premium aftermarket suspension is put together. The quantities are smaller – just 20,000 parts a year – and the experience level of the staff working here is higher. This is where cutting-edge technology developed in racing is made available to the rest of us. In the off-road world this means cone-valve forks and Trax shocks, which can cost thousands. For track riders, it means suspension developed in MotoGP. That's not an exaggeration – Dani Pedrosa recently entered two wildcard races using a WP fork built in this room.

Tubular bills

Steel tube is the most important material at KTM Components. Between turning it into frames and exhaust systems, this factory alone has an appetite for around 1000km (over 600 miles) of the stuff every year, or roughly three million individual tubes.

Until recently tubes were bought in already processed, but KTM are moving production in-house. This means buying in raw tube then bending and cutting it on site. It's more work, but rather than placing bulk orders with suppliers and lengthy lead times, they can build what they want, in the quantities they need, and know when it'll be ready.

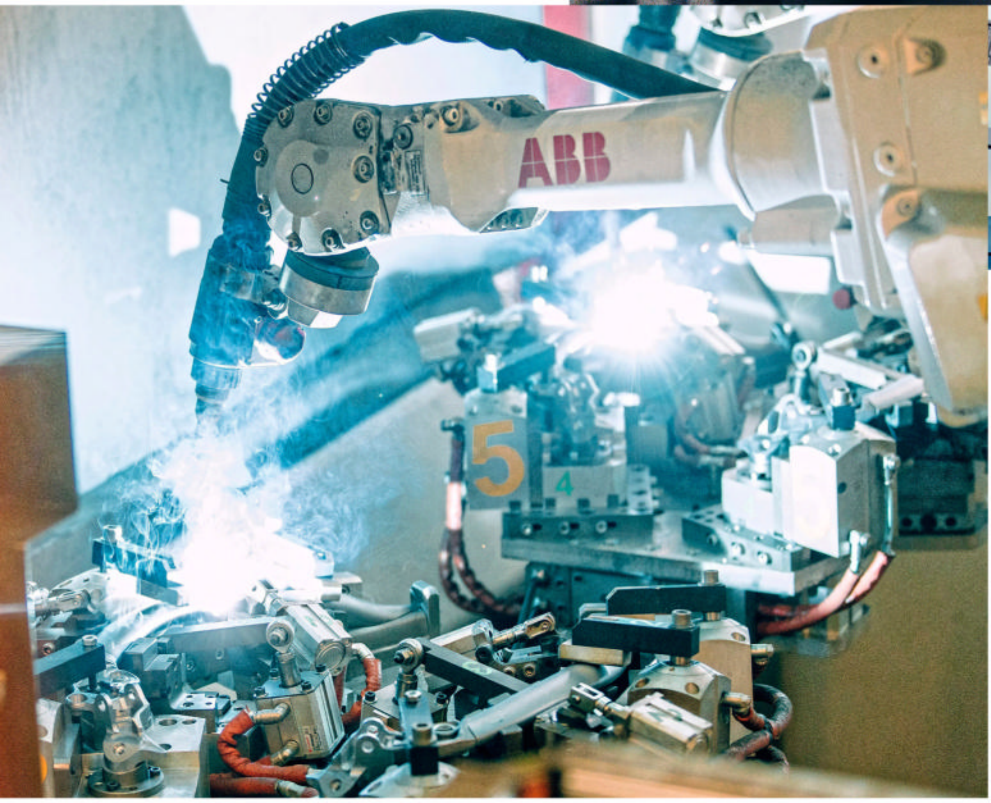
Twenty different grades of steel tube are required to build all the frames and exhausts for bikes ranging from 50cc motocrossers to 1390 Super Dukes. All frames are made from 25CrMo4, a high-strength steel containing chromium and molybdenum.



> ‘Steel tube is the most important material at KTM Components – it has an appetite for around 1000km of the stuff every year’

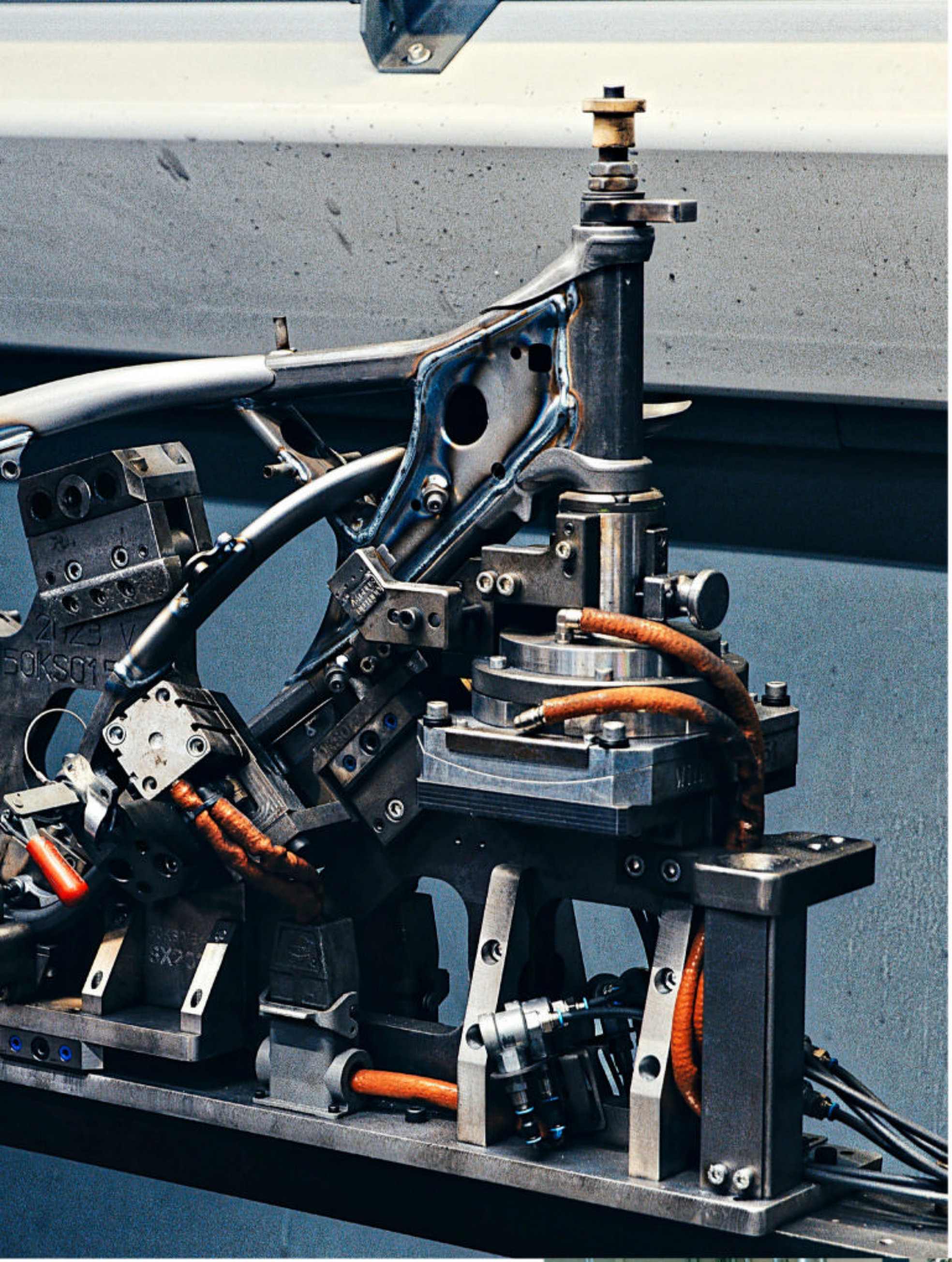
Round the bend

Bending large-diameter, high-tensile steel takes serious muscle. Cut tubes are bent in electric CNC machines, which KTM say are more precise than hydraulic pipe benders. Stainless steel up to 62mm in diameter can be bent at room temperature without any wrinkling or the need for welding. Every 100 tubes or so, a sample is measured by a 3D laser scanner that forensically checks it against a reference. If it's out slightly – likely due to tiny differences in the spring rates of the tubes caused by minute variations in alloys – the machine is automatically recalibrated. A fraction of a degree in a single tube may not seem like much, but with up to 60 bent tubes in a frame, it all adds up.



Robots and lasers

Raw steel tube is cut to length in seconds by a pair of enormous 3D laser cutters (the Lasertube LT7, in case you were wondering). There are also specialist five-axis laser cutters (TruLaser Cell 8030) that can operate on pre-bent tubes, for example to cut holes rather than drill them. The processes are hugely automated – even the cut tubes are swiftly picked up, moved and precisely packed in boxes by a huge articulated yellow robot arm (Fanuc M-710iC). Robots are also used to transport parts around the factory, the autonomous machines quietly moving boxes from station to station, pausing politely if they detect a human in the way. Think C-3PO, not Terminator.



In the frame

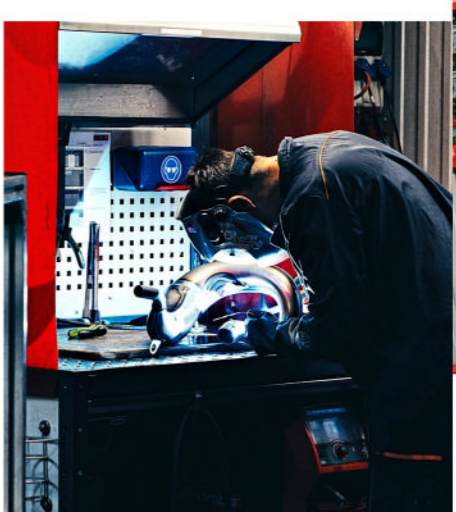
Frames are assembled from cut and bent tubes combined with bought-in forged components. All parts are arranged by hand in a dedicated welding jig, each of which costs €200,000 (£167,000), but most of the welding is performed by one of 40 robots. KTM say just 4% of a typical off-road frame is welded by hand, while a 990 Duke frame is 100% robot-welded. This means meticulous consistency and ferocious speed – a metre of welding can be done in just one minute. All welds are done using cold metal transfer, a low-temperature MIG process in which the welding wire protrudes and retracts 50 times a second, creating a strong weld with little ugly spatter. But humans haven't been removed entirely. Every weld is inspected by a certified welder, and KTM-C has a Welding Academy to pass skills to future generations.

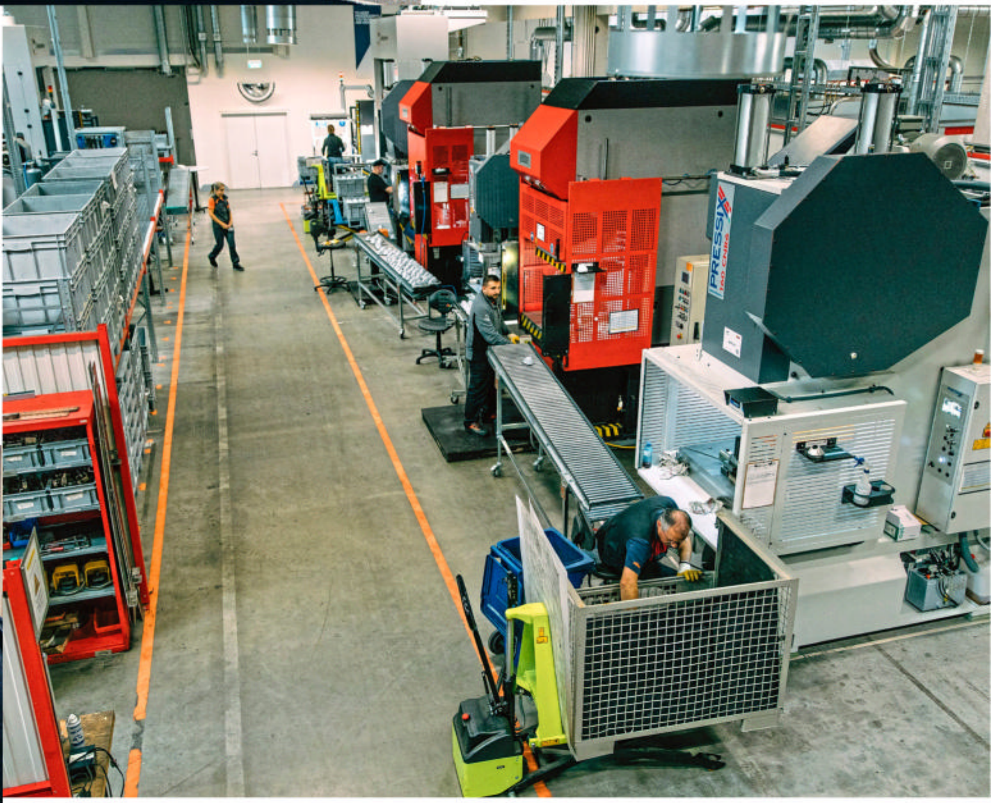
Exhausting work

The precious metals in catalytic converters mean exhausts are the most expensive component on a modern motorcycle. KTM-C build the exhaust systems for every bike built in Mattighofen, which could require up to 500 silencers per shift. Most parts are produced on site, either from tube or sheet metal. Off-road silencers are riveted together by hand while street silencers are welded, so the processes stay separated on different production lines. Silencer outer shells are laser marked with KTM, Husqvarna or GasGas branding. At the end of the assembly process every exhaust system is individually inspected and goes through a leakage test.

Smokey and they bend it

With KTM building both road and off-road motorcycles in the same factory, KTM-C has to supply exhaust systems ranging from huge snaking heavyweight V-twin systems to delicate two-stroke expansion chambers. Two-stroke systems are even more sensitive to production tolerances than four-stroke, as the tiniest variance in how accurately an expansion chamber is constructed can have a dramatic consequence on performance. A difference of just half a millimetre in diameter can cost up to 3bhp.





KTM engine issues

KTM's 790 has caused a bit of online fuss. Time for some answers...

'It's not the camshafts – it's the finger followers'

Do KTM's parallel twins have a problem with camshaft wear? *Bike* gets some answers

» In January, a Facebook group named 'KTM Failed Camshaft' was created. It swiftly gathered a sizeable following, with dozens of members sharing similar discoveries of gruesomely worn camshafts across KTM's 790 and 890 parallel-twin engines. By summer the group was thousands strong. A mass of stories, photos, theories, rumours and speculation was shared concerning how widespread the issue was, which engines were affected, which parts were to blame and what was – or, more importantly, what wasn't – being done about it.

On July 18, KTM's official Facebook page posted in the group, acknowledging the 'camshaft topic', naming certain models and production years, but claiming the 'quality and integrity of the camshaft itself is not the problem'. While the post's intent was to reassure owners, it raised more questions than it answered. Was this an admission that there was a problem? If the cams weren't at fault, what was? And if there was a problem, would KTM issue a recall? To find out what's going on, *Bike* spoke to Federico Valentini, KTM's vice-president of global marketing. This is what he had to say…

'There's a little bit of a misunderstanding. It's actually not a camshaft topic: it's a finger follower topic. That's the root cause. In our investigations we found that it's the dimensions and the coating of the finger follower. It's not the material or shape of the camshaft at all.

'Another thing our investigations showed was that the lubrication to the cylinder head could, in very few cases, get obstructed by debris from production processes, and not enough oil would get to the finger follower and the cam. And that could potentially cause excessive camshaft wear.

'What we're talking about here is the 790 Duke and 790 Adventures produced in 2018, 2019 and 2020, plus a very limited production of 890 Duke Rs in 2020. In 2020 we implemented a new finger follower which is 1mm wider, has tighter tolerances and an improved DLC [diamond-like carbon] coating. We also introduced an additional oil filter in the engine, a gauze that captures debris and can be cleaned and replaced at service.

'So, to be clear: none of the 890s produced from 2020 onwards have this potential issue. Nor does the Husqvarna Norden 901, the Svartpilen 801, or any of KTM's current 790 and 990 engines.

'We have already emailed all owners of those motorcycles from those model years that might be affected, and we've informed our dealer network. If a customer suspects they have a problem – if they notice reduced power, excessive noise or difficulty in starting – they should take the bike to a KTM dealer. They will check the bike too, and if they agree they will take the engine apart and check the cams and finger followers. If these need to be replaced, we will bear the cost of the replacement, even if the bike is out of warranty – and as we're talking about bikes from 2018, 2019 and 2020, they are out of warranty. If a customer has already paid to have this fixed, we will reimburse them.

'The failure rate is very small – around 0.5 per cent. The production volume for those models in those years was 55,000 units, and we have seen around 300 bikes with an issue. There has to be a combination of various matters, so it only affects a small number of the bikes produced. It is not a safety issue and it's not something that will just suddenly happen. The onset is gradual – you will notice it well in advance.

'We really want to move on from this. We are dealing with it. We want our customers to enjoy our motorcycles and know if they were to, in the unlikely event, have an issue with their engine, we will cover it. We have their back, we will support them, and they can continue to ride on and enjoy their 790s.'

LET US KNOW Has your KTM parallel twin been affected by worn camshafts, or is it still running perfectly? Email us on bike@bikemagazine.co.uk

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Trea

Triumph's latest **Scrambler 1200 XE** isn't the obvious adventure bike and Corsica isn't the most obvious adventuring destination. But as **Simon Weir** finds out, they makes an unexpectedly brilliant pairing

PICS: SIMON WEIR, YOSHI0511/SHUTTERSTOCK

For half a second I'm blind. Rolling out of the shade beneath the pines, round the 90° bend, the sun hits me full in the face and I'm blinking, despite the black visor. Then I'm blinking again, struggling to take in the view that's opened up in front of me. The tightly packed trees are all behind me now, replaced by a ridiculous panorama.

The horizon is a sawtooth bowl of grey peaks rising from green hills that drop down to a deep valley, patchworked in sandy hues and olive drab. I'm at the top of the Bocca di Sorba pass, the road cascading away beneath me. Glancing over the edge I see hairpins linking short straights and inviting bends. Then my focus snaps ahead as I'm into the first switchback. I brake to a late apex, easing off the stoppers as I tip in. Of course, I'm in the wrong gear – too much time admiring the view, not enough time concentrating on the bike. Thankfully the Triumph Scrambler 1200 XE is flexible. The parallel twin

Corse
Aleria

It's a French island, don't you know...

sure island

By **Simon Weir**

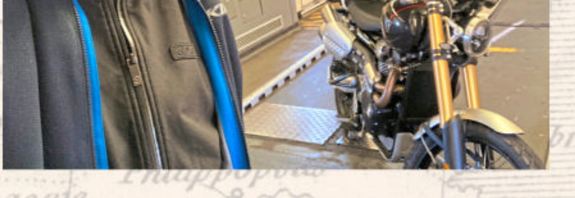
Truly glorious tarmac, epic views. Oh, and a great bike, too

does chug a little as the revs drop, but it still pulls hard as I work the throttle. Then I'm out of that bend and lining up the next one – a fast kink that's taken with a flick of the hips and a broad grin.

This is Corsica – and while I've been here several times, it never fails to surprise and delight. Every time the roads are better, every time the views surprise me. Memory simply can't do it justice – whether it's the sun-blasted coast or the forested hinterland, everything is bigger and more vivid in person. Getting here may have been a challenge, but jumping on the ferry was the best decision I've made this year.

Napoleon's island

I took three days to get across France. I've previously done the run between Calais and the Med in one, two, three and



Trapped wind face? Judging by the carriage, it's escaped...

They're a rebellious bunch on Corsica. Unlike the Triumph

Napoleon memorial in Champaubert, on the ride down to Corsica

even four days… and while one day feels like a self-inflicted punishment and two just uses a lot of motorway, three's a nice balance. I'm willing to take an hour of péage if it lets me spend the rest of the day on cracking roads.

It's a good warm-up, too. From the open roads of northern France to the twistier hills of Burgundy and then the balcony roads of the Vercors Alps, the riding gets more challenging as I head south. I approach the Riviera on Route Napoleon – named after Corsica's number-one export in the 17-1800s.

My overnight crossing leaves Nice at 11:15pm and drops me next morning in Corsica's capital, Ajaccio. Bikes are off the ferry first so by 8:30am I'm filling the Scrambler's 15-litre tank on the edge of Bonaparte's home town – and it's already warm – 20°C. I head south on the main T40. There's a hazy quality to the morning light, making everything look like an art-house movie. The road is so thickly covered with an intricate pattern of tar seams it looks like the gospels of some tarmac god, written in the hieroglyphics of a long-lost language. The first commandment? Twist the throttle…

Sea to summit

This is August, the height of French holiday season, but even this main road is quiet. Half a dozen overtakes and I'm stopping for breakfast in Petreto-Bicchisano. Sounds very Italian, but then Corsica was once ruled by Genoa – until it rebelled. There's a history of that, with the islanders wanting to be independent of everyone from the current Paris government to the Moors in the eighth century (for all that the island's flag is a severed Moorish head).

I head inland from Petreto-Bicchisano, leaving the quiet coast road for deserted passes twisting into the hills. I remember this road. The first time I rode it, there was no road… it was being replaced and several miles had just been removed. Then I hit fresh tarmac, like Cadwell Park with added wild boar. This time it's a perfect surface from the word go, but after a few miles I do meet more hogs. I come round an uphill corner to see a pair of pigs trotting across the road ahead – tiny, Disney cute, silhouetted against the sky. I'm still 100m away when they're off the road, but I'm more concerned about where Mummy Pig and Daddy Pig might be. They won't be small and they're not likely to be friendly.

Simon says this is a 'light lunch' in Solenzara…

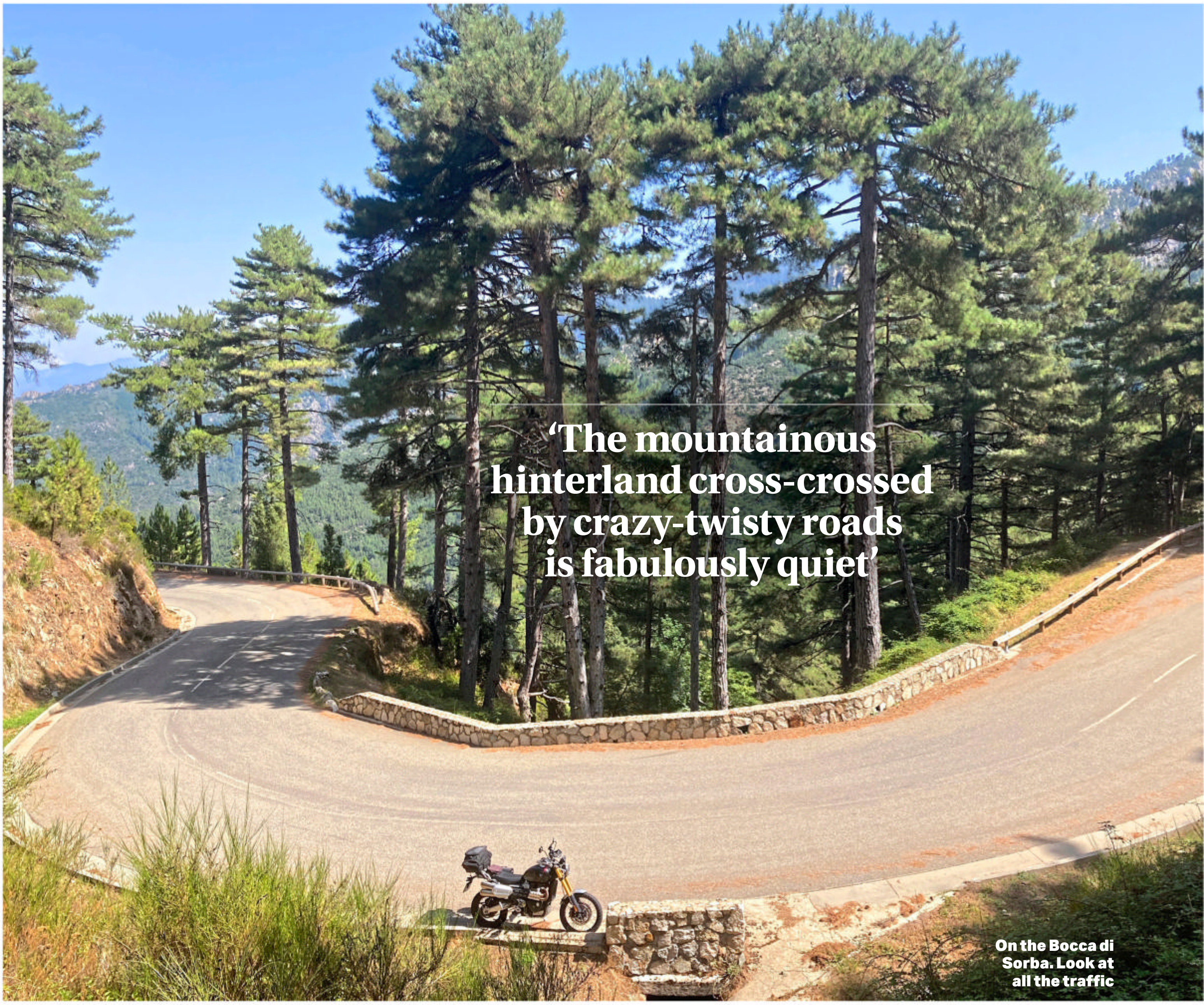
Warning: road signs also used as target practice

Reminders of Corsica's gory history at every turn

I don't see the big boars, thankfully. But it's no surprise the wildlife is so bold on these roads. I get at least six miles before seeing another vehicle – and even then, it's parked up near the top of the pass. Over the next three days I do see more boars on the road, as well as domestic pigs, cows, a horse and dozens of shaggy goats with big horns, like the things the sandpeople rode in *Star Wars*.

At the top of Col de Saint-Eustache the trees start to fall away, leaving bare rocks on one side of the road and huge views on the other. I stop to take a few pics and one bike goes past, a couple of cars. Where is everyone?

I find out soon enough. Seems everyone's at the top of Col de Bavella. It's a fabulous ride – back in the forest, twists and turns in the road giving glimpses of grey peaks like something from the Dolomites. I had intended to stop at the café at the top of the pass but it's thronged. I'm just starting to get off the bike when a car stops in front and begins reversing, as if he's going to park on top of me. Key on, blast of horn, shoulder check and move… I won't be stopping here, after all.



‘The mountainous hinterland cross-crossed by crazy-twisty roads is fabulously quiet’

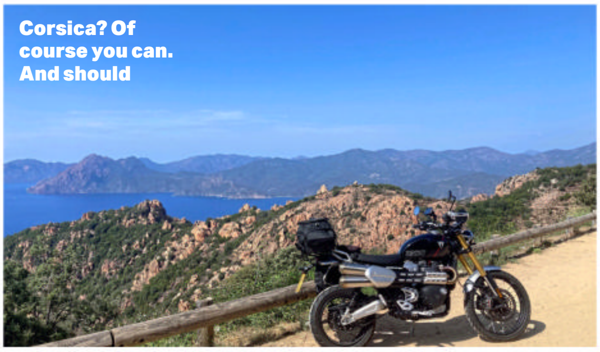
On the Bocca di Sorba. Look at all the traffic

Corsica: deserted roads, amazing scenery, no one goes

The fourth largest island in the Mediterranean, Corsica’s roughly the size of Lincolnshire with about a third of the population. It’s a rocky island, with the biggest population centres on the coast. That means the mountainous hinterland, criss-crossed by crazy-twisty roads, is fabulously quiet – even at peak holiday season, as so many visitors come for the beautiful beaches.

Weather’s good from April to October – it’s the sunniest part of France, with temperatures in the 20s for six months of the year. Although, as it’s an island, it’s temperate and rarely breaks into the 30s.

You can only get to Corsica by boat, but there are sailings from Marseille, Toulon and Nice, as well as Genoa and Savona in Italy. An overnight sailing maximises your time on the island. Rather than staying in the main ports of Ajaccio and Bastia, it’s better to head to the smaller towns like Bonifacio and Porto-Vecchio in the south; Piana or Porto on the west coast; Aléria on the east coat; or Calvi or Saint-Florent on the north.



Corsica? Of course you can. And should

The eastern side of the island is flatter and has the only straight bits of road, along with miles of golden beaches. Inland and along the west and north coasts, there are miles of astonishing riding and quiet villages. And wild boar. Don’t forget the wild boar…

Crossing the Col de la Tana. It's all as good as this en Corse

The trip in numbers

Nine days
2405 miles
£22 in tolls
£389 in petrol

That's the thing about islands. The locals seem to drive differently – even to the rest of Europe. I start taking very cautious lines into most bends. Especially right-handers, as cars cut corners as consistently as cowboy builders after a Friday lunch in the pub.

I drop down to the coast and run south. The RT10 is busier – not British bank holiday busy, but I make a few overtakes. Mind you, the beaches glimpsed from the road, lapped by crystal clear blue waters, aren't like British beaches either. From Porto-Vecchio I get back on the traffic-free roads of the hills before descending to my overnight stop near Bonifacio at the southern tip.

Summit to sea

The next morning I snake inland again. I'm using roads I've ridden before, but not for a few years, and they've changed – very much for the better. This is not what I'd anticipated. I'd come on the Scrambler because I was expecting bumpy and patchy roads, gravel… some sections with no road at all. And although one short stretch is as rough as Suffolk, mostly I find smooth and grippy tarmac or brand-new roads.

This riding is simply astonishing. I cross the middle of the island, deafened not by modestly fruity Triumph exhaust but by the sound of my mind being blown. Far from needing the XE's long-travel suspension to soak up bumps and dirt, I'm relishing its agility and accuracy on smooth roads, flicking from one tight turn to the next.

For mile after sun-kissed mile. Towards the end of day two I hit the west coast again, just north of Ajaccio heading to Piana. The next stretch is stunning, cut through the red rocks known as the Calanques. It's popular with tourists, though, so there are a few more cars and people walking on the road to get pictures. For the final few miles into Porto it feels as if, rather than being alone on a biking desert island, I have come to a popular holiday destination.

I have an uneasy feeling that my final day will be the same, but that fear's dispelled within the first few miles. North to Calvi over Col de Palmarella, then round to Saint-Florent and along the coast. This is the staggering riding of Cap Corse – the raised finger at the top of the island's fist. It's stunningly beautiful, with the white-tipped waves breaking on beaches far below me to the left of the road and cliffs rising on the right. And it's quiet again – almost no traffic. At the top of the D80 I take the tiny-road loop to Tollare and Barcaggio at the very tip of the island. I grab a much-needed ice cream then swing back down the coast to Bastia for another overnight ferry. Three days have flown past. Three days of spectacular roads, epic views, great food… and it seemed like I was the only British bike on the island.

Corsica feels like a secret. So many amazing roads, such a wild, untamed landscape… it's biking heaven but there's hardly anyone here. And the best bit is, when I get off the ferry I'll have another three days of great riding to get home. But Corsica will always be the highlight.

Beer at Porto (and a trapped spider, maybe?)

Retro adventuring

A charismatic retro alternative to simply picking a BMW GS, the taller Scrambler model can handle any kind of surface. It was hard work on motorways and stopping at traffic lights in a hot city (I'm looking at you, Nice) wasn't comfortable with that high-routed exhaust – but it is only an issue when stationary. Even creeping along at 3mph, heat isn't a problem.

The motor is grunty and flexible, although it's happiest between 4000-7000rpm. There's not too much point hanging on to revs past that – and chasing anything over 80mph takes an act of will to hang on to it. Brakes are good, and the chassis is flickable and surprisingly composed and accurate.

The seat is on the firm side at the end of a long day but – high-speed windblast aside – it's a very comfortable riding position. The test bike came with Triumph's tail bag (excellent but fiddly fitting) and one-sided pannier (excellent and easy to fit/remove).

> 'I'm relishing its agility and accuracy, flicking from one tight turn to the next'

SPECIFICATION	TRIUMPH SCRAMBLER 1200 XE
Contact	triumphmotorcycles.co.uk
Price (on the road)	£13,295 (£14,206 as tested)
Capacity	1200cc
Engine	8v SOHC parallel twin
Transmission	6-speed, chain
Power	89bhp @ 7000rpm
Torque	81 lb.ft @ 4250rpm
Frame	tubular steel
Front suspension	45mm upside-down forks, fully adjustable
Rear suspension	twin shocks, fully adjustable
Brakes (f/r)	2 x 320mm discs, 4-pot calipers, ABS / 225mm disc, 1-pot caliper, ABS
Tyres (f/r)	90/90 R21 / 150/70 R17
Rake/trail	26.9°/129.2mm
Wheelbase	1570mm
Weight (wet)	230kg
Seat height	870mm
Tank size	15 litres
Electronics	cornering ABS and TC, cruise control, six modes

***Bike* verdict** We were always fans of the Scrambler and the latest 1200 is better than ever. Ride quality is great, there's punch aplenty, and it's genuinely long-legged enough for adventure-bike antics. And look at it.

***Bike* rating**	9/10

Needs a screen, maybe. That's about it

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Advice, guidance and things to do with bikes

KNOW HOW

BIKES

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Thing of the month

Auritech Biker earplugs £19.99

The ideal compromise between custom earplugs (pricey, rarely have compression to allow them to fill the ear canal and stay secure) and disposables (environmentally unsound, inconsistent quality). These silicone Christmas trees fit whatever shaped hole they're shoved into, and can be easily washed before being popped back in their alloy keyring canister. This set have lasted three years and still have a bit of life left.

Chris Newbigging

auritech.co.uk

EXPERTS IN THIS ISSUE

John Westlake

Proper journo

Reports on daily life with Beemer's F900GS adventurist.

Lyle Armitage

Young person

Highlights the bike kit approved for use by fussy teenagers.

Rupe Farnsworth

Obsessive

Tells all you need to know (and more) about screw threads.

Michael Neeves

Road tester

Reveals the bestest rubber for large adventure tackle.

Mike Armitage

Editorist

Puts our new GSX-8R wheel to wheel with his 1998 GSX-R750.

Ian Martin

Team Bike boss

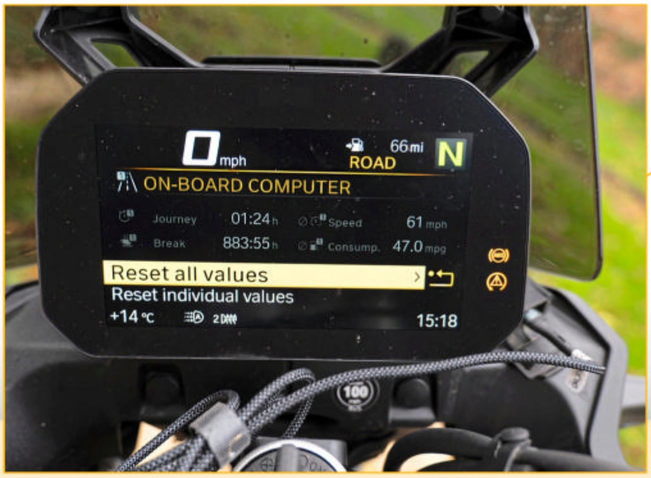
Delivers end-of-year bulletin on endurance racing a Honda RC30.

[Living with]

BMW F

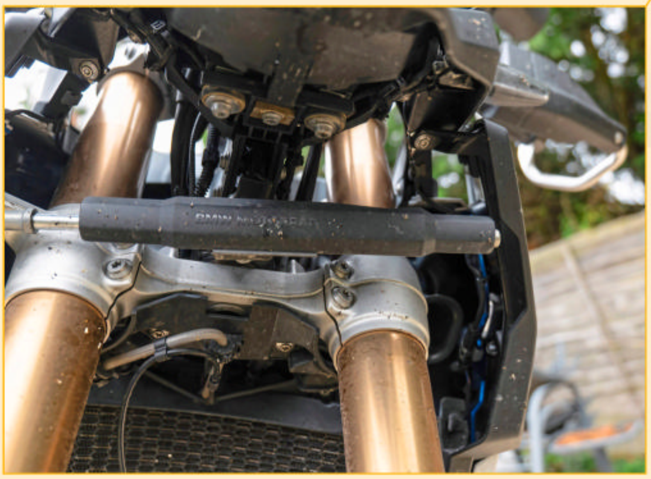
SNOWPLOUGH SCREEN

This barn door approach to aerodynamics works fine. At 6ft, my head is left in smooth air while my torso is kept out of the airflow. Although it looks as aerodynamically efficient as a sideboard, I get more than 50mpg on motorway runs so it can't be that bad.


0 mph
66 mi
ROAD
N
ON-BOARD COMPUTER
Journey 01:24 h
Speed 61 mph
Break 883:55 h
Consump. 47.0 mpg
Reset all values
Reset individual values
+14 °C
15:18

MENU IRRITATIONS

Most menu-based niggles disappear as you get faster at zipping from music to average mpg or whatever. The only residual irritations are setting the trip, which is still fiddly even when you know where to find it (in the 'Bike Information' page) and the lack of cruise control.



STEERING DAMPER

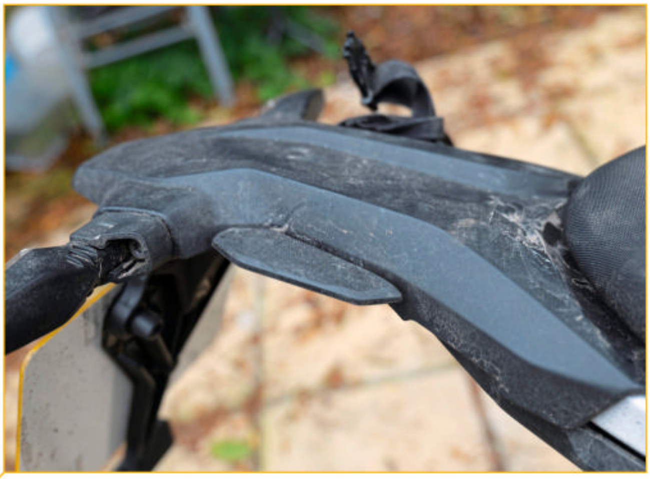
The day after telling a mate that the GS is one of the most stable adventure bikes I'd ever ridden – no amount of lairy acceleration out of bumpy corners will set it weaving – I noticed this tucked away under the nose. It's set fairly soft – you don't notice it at low speeds.

ROBUSTNESS

The switchgear you see here is all standard BMW fare, and works well. But check out the handguards – easily the strongest, most pleasingly robust I've ever seen on a production bike. That vibe is carried through to the rest of the 900. It feels tough.

900GS

Looks like a big supermoto and excels on fast trails, but what it's like to live with? **John Westlake** tells all



ANNOYING TAIL

Weirdly, there are no easy mounting points for soft luggage so you end up either wrapping bungees under the tail and seat, or bodging them onto the protuberances you see here. Even my BMW tail pack is a pain to secure. And you can't spec the GS with luggage.

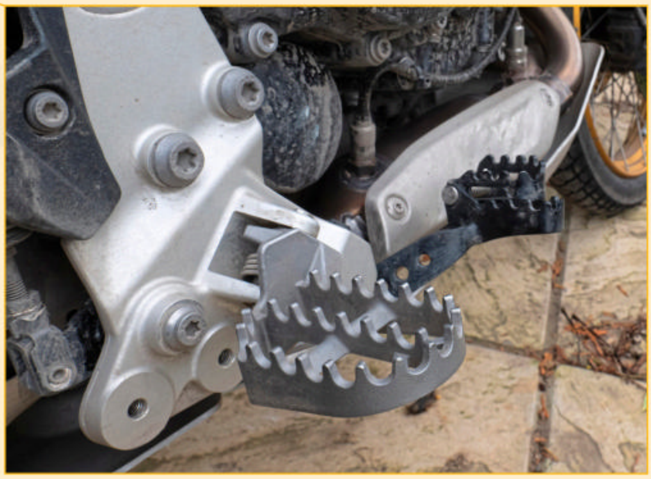
AKRAPOVIC
BMW MOTORRAD

QUALITY EVERYWHERE

The Akrapovic comes as standard, looks lovely and typifies the GS's quality feel. No fasteners have furred up, the white frame paint feels about 4mm thick and the plastics have a solid heft to them. If any corners were cut during production, they're not obvious.

PROPER OFF-ROAD PARTS (1)

The bash plate is no cosmetic adornment that'll fracture at the first sign of trouble. I thought it would be marked by flying rocks after a couple of high-speed blasts up stony tracks, but it looks like I'll have to actually crash into something to make a dent.



PROPER OFF-ROAD PARTS (2)

Aggressive pegs are essential for muddy work, and these are excellent – big enough to let you stay standing for ages without getting achy feet, and spiky enough to give grip when your boots are caked in clay. Neat two-position brake pedal makes it comfy standing or sitting.

[Knowledge]

New bikes

‘It’ll shrug off a trail – and the odd spill’

It’s in the eye of the beholder

BMW R1300GS Adventure

Big-tank, high-rise version of Beemer’s über-giant-trailie

What’s new? The Adventure version of the latest 1300 has at last arrived. Starting at £18,870, this is the serious go-anywhere version with a giant 30-litre fuel tank and 20mm more suspension travel at each end, plus a shimmering spec that includes adjustable ’bar height, semi-active ride, and an options list that could fill this entire magazine.

SET RES
OFF/ON
MENU
OFF

One finger, one thumb, keep moving, etc

***Bike*’s opinion** As with the regular R1300GS, don’t be put off by the Adventure’s figures. Despite being 269kg (without extra goodies) and having a towering (though adjustable) 870/890mm seat height, the new GSA is better balanced at low speed than it has right to be, even with the huge tank full. Even getting it off the stand is an absolute doddle. The giant opposed-twin motor is glorious, the handling effortless, the ride superb, the riding position ace. It’ll shrug off a trail (and the odd spill), and options like the adaptive cruise, ASA semi-auto gearbox and electric screen are superb. Better than a regular GS? If you go for all the blingy tech, yes. Or if you want to do 300 miles between stops…

Gold wheels: this year's thing

Voge DS900X

A BMW for those who don't want a BMW

What's new? Voge is the posh brand from Loncin, the Chinese giant who make BMW's parallel-twin engines. The DS900X has an engine based on BMW's F900GS, and the swingarm, frame, forks, shock and tubeless spoked wheels are all familiar. High level of standard-fit whatnots, but costs just £9199. ***Bike*'s opinion** Self-mapped motor feels and goes like the old F850GS. It steers neutrally (better than many bikes covered in metal boxes), has ample feel and soaks up B-road bumps. Decent comfort, too. The electronics are competent, rather than brilliant, but you get headed grips and seat. Then you remember it's nine grand – it's impressive for the money.

The same, but also different

Kawasaki Versys 1100SE

More wallop for the underrated tourist

What's new? 3mm longer stroke takes inline four's capacity from 1043cc to 1099cc. Extra 14 horses give 133bhp, torque is up from 75 to 83 lb.ft. Longer gearing, too. And, erm… that's about it, unless you're bothered by brake discs that are no longer petal-shaped and the 'Rideology' app now having voice control. ***Bike*'s opinion** Is the smooth, strong motor improved? Hard to tell in isolation, but it is ace. All else is still lovely: ride quality from the SE's electronic suspension is spot-on, it's roomy, it has a vast pillion seat and it's quiet in the wind. At £15,741 with oodles of toys, it's a class act.

Does it all – and we persuaded him to buy it

[Why I love my…]

2016 Suzuki V-Strom 1000

Kevin Close, 60, loves all V-Stroms – but this is his favourite

I love the V-Strom because it's an all-round fantastic motorcycle that's reliable and economical, and you can still have a lot of fun on it. I know people say there's no grin factor but I disagree – I was grinning yesterday riding it round the Lakes.

I had a V-Strom 650 for six years which I did 25,000 miles on, then I saw the V-Strom 1000 you guys at *Bike* rode to Japan. It was on the Suzuki stand at the NEC and I vowed to get one of the limited-edition Desert versions that had that rugged look.

And in 2022 I did – I got a used 16-plate bike. The 650 was great, but you had to use the gears – you couldn't just roll on the power to overtake. But with the 1000 you can just go. I love the engine.

I've fitted a Givi top box for day trips – the original panniers are okay, but if I was going away for more than a week I'd change them because they're not deep enough for much gear. The previous owner put a Nitron shock on it to improve the two-up performance and it works fine so I've left that on.

One of the big selling points is the riding position which is really comfortable – I did 200 miles on it yesterday in one hit and had no problems at all. A lot of people have buffeting issues with the screen and put extensions on, but I don't suffer from that even when I'm wearing a peaked helmet. I just stick the screen in the middle of the three settings and it's fine.

The standard seat was a little bit hard, so I changed it for a SHAD one, which is more comfortable. But other than that, it's perfect. I can't imagine selling it, but saying that I like the look of the GSX-S1000GX. The problem is it's £15,000, which is a lot more than I paid for the V-Strom.

> 'All-round fantastic motorcycle'

» Thanks to the Suzuki V-Strom UK Owners Group (v-strom.co.uk), which Kevin helps run.

Buying tips

» What to look for Very early bikes (2002-on) can have weak alternators and clutches. On models like Kevin's (2014-on) check for rusty or leaky radiators, free-moving exhaust SET valves, and worn finishes/fur pretty much all over. XT models fetch more.

» What to pay From £3250 ('14-on).

» Insurance go to mcncompare.com

MCN COMPARE

Listings

This isn't a limp brochure-style round-up of all the bikes you can buy. No, your guide is far more useful as it **only contains bikes that we have tested**, with comparable on-the-road prices plus data, expert opinion and must-know detail gathered by fussy full-time testers. We do hundreds of thousands of miles, dyno, datalog, weigh and answer the big questions. Don't buy a new bike without reading this first.

BIKE	PRICE	ENGINE	TOP SPEED	POWER	MPG	BIKE VERDICT	RATING	TESTED
APRILIA uk.aprilia.com, 00800 15565500 *Bike's* choice: Tuono Factory defines the supernaked class… but we'd buy an RS660								
RSV4 Factory	**£23,000**	**1099cc V4**	**186mph***	**214bhp****	**45mpg**	Ace engine, great suspension and electronics, exemplary steering. Also tiny, and depreciates.	**9/10**	**Jul '21**
Tuono V4 Factory	**£18,100**	**1077cc V4**	**165mph**	**159bhp**	**35mpg**	Superb motor, crisp chassis, exotic-yet-friendly. Cool. Non-Factory model is every-day usable.	**10/10**	**Jul '24**
Tuareg 660	**£10,600**	**659cc twin**	**120mph***	**79bhp****	**59mpg****	Ténéré rival is less rounded but has more tech and better suspension. Rugged, fun, but a bit raw.	**8/10**	**Oct '22**
RS660	**£10,300**	**659cc twin**	**139mph**	**91bhp**	**45mpg**	Sportsbike handling, punch and tech; sports-tourer comfort and usability. Impressive thing.	**10/10**	**Dec '24**
Tuono 660	**£9700**	**659cc twin**	**135mph***	**90bhp***	**50mpg**	Comfier and more agile than RS660, more fun than a Street Triple. Fancier Factory version £10k.	**9/10**	**Jun '21**
ARIEL arielmotor.co.uk, 01460 78817 *Bike's* choice: loads of options and extras, but it's got to have girder forks								
Ace	**£28,345**	**1237cc V4**	**165mph****	**173bhp****	**40mpg***	Machined alloy frame, Honda V4, girder forks, endless choices. Fast, capable, work of art.	**8/10**	**Jun '19**
BENELLI benelli.com, 0844 4128450 *Bike's* choice: not ridden it yet, but the Leoncino 800 Trail looks tidy…								
752 S	**£7899**	**754cc twin**	**95mph***	**75bhp****	**55mpg**	Designed in Italy, built in China. Looks a bit disjointed but rides well – not MT-07 league, but good.	**7/10**	**Jul '20**
TRK 502	**£6199**	**500cc twin**	**95mph***	**46bhp****	**72mpg****	Lacks a little balance and refinement, but good value distance tool. Italy's best-selling big bike.	**6/10**	**Mar '18**
BIMOTA bimotauk.co.uk, 01603 920240 *Bike's* choice: radical, extreme, whacky, beautiful… who wouldn't want a Tesi?								
Tesi H2	**£59,000**	**998cc V4**	**190mph***	**237bhp****	**28mpg**	Epic supercharged motor in delicious hub-steered chassis. Exquisite, wild, thirsty, expensive.	**8/10**	**Sep '21**
BMW bmw-motorrad.co.uk, 0800 777155 *Bike's* choice: yeah, it's predictable… but brilliance of the GS can't be ignored								
R18 Classic	**£19,540**	**1802cc flat twin**	**115mph***	**91bhp****	**51mpg**	Ace boxer cruiser spoilt a tad by its slightly Harley-ish screen and bags, but still a tidy device.	**8/10**	**May '21**
R18	**£17,480**	**1802cc flat twin**	**113mph**	**87bhp**	**50mpg**	Top mix of modernity, quality and tradition. Roctane model (£22k) has less bling, more handling.	**9/10**	**Jul '21**
K1600GT	**£21,100**	**1649cc inline 6**	**154mph****	**158bhp****	**48mpg****	Magical motor, amazing agility, self-levelling suspension, all the toys… It's a sporty-super-tourer.	**9/10**	**Jul '22**
R1300GS TE	**£18,465**	**1300cc flat twin**	**135mph****	**138bhp**	**49mpg**	Less weight, more oomph, fancy toys – it's the best big GS yet. But the Ducati Multi' V4 is slicker…	**9/10**	**Jul '24**
R1250RT	**£17,350**	**1254cc flat twin**	**142mph**	**117bhp**	**50mpg**	Go-to tourer isn't to all tastes but you can't argue that the variable-valve radar-shod twin is top.	**9/10**	**Dec '21**
R1250RS SE	**£15,410**	**1254cc flat twin**	**139mph**	**127bhp**	**50mpg**	Fast, comfy, accomplished, lots of tech – sports-tourers aren't dead. Not perfect, but it's close.	**9/10**	**May '20**
R1250R	**£12,330**	**1254cc flat twin**	**150mph***	**134bhp****	**60mpg****	Ace variable-valve motor in friendly, comfy, capable chassis. Better pure road bike than a GS?	**9/10**	**Aug '19**
R12 nineT	**£14,420**	**1170cc flat twin**	**140mph***	**108bhp****	**55mpg****	High-quality retro with thumping twin, solid handling, top details, and more tech than ever. Ace.	**9/10**	**May '24**
M1000RR	**£36,040**	**999cc inline 4**	**195mph***	**209bhp***	**36mpg***	Wild homologation exotica with stupid power and wings – yet you can ride it to work. Mind-blowing.	**9/10**	**Dec '23**
S1000RR Sport	**£18,610**	**998cc inline 4**	**190mph***	**207bhp****	**44mpg****	Faster, sharper and more high-tech than ever, yet still pleasingly usable. Wow. Base model £17,150.	**10/10**	**Mar '22**
S1000XR	**£15,740**	**998cc inline 4**	**155mph**	**161bhp**	**43mpg**	High-rise sportsbike. Fast, agile, well equipped, odd seat. M-XR version (£22,580) is sublime…	**8/10**	**Mar '23**
S1000R Sport	**£15,315**	**998cc inline 4**	**167mph**	**163bhp**	**48mpg**	Not shouty, but epic: agility, ride, engine and spec are superb. M1000R (£19,480) not worth extra.	**10/10**	**Aug '22**
F900XR	**£10,350**	**895cc twin**	**130mph***	**100bhp**	**50mpg**	Easy-to-ride Tracer rival with eager twin, quality chassis, fine spec. Very good. Naked R is 'meh'.	**8/10**	**Feb '24**
F900GS	**£11,995**	**895cc twin**	**130mph***	**103bhp****	**60mpg****	Better on road and trail than previous 850. Not full of character, but the best GS for greenlaning.	**8/10**	**May '24**
F750GS	**£8995**	**853cc twin**	**110mph***	**76bhp**	**69mpg****	Slim front tyre and 19in wheel make this detuned 850 a better road bike. But lacks some 'wow'.	**7/10**	**May '18**
G310GS	**£5890**	**313cc single**	**88mph****	**34bhp****	**84mpg****	Decent quality, easy to ride, but missing a defining GS character. Not peanuts, but good.	**7/10**	**Mar '18**
BSA bsacompany.co.uk *Bike's* choice: there's only one model so far, good job it's quite compelling…								
Gold Star	**£6300**	**652cc single**	**105mph***	**43bhp**	**58mpg**	A2-legal retro with '50s style, decent quality and iconic badge. For laid-back Sunday pootles.	**8/10**	**Apr '23**
CCM ccm-motorcycles.com, 01204 544930 *Bike's* choice: of the various Spitfire variants the flat-tracker models look coolest								
Spitfire Bobber	**£10,585**	**600cc single**	**100mph***	**55bhp****	**56mpg**	Curious mix of laid-back bobber styling with stiff chassis and revvy power. Not mega, but good.	**8/10**	**Jan '20**
CFMOTO cfmoto.co.uk *Bike's* choice: Chinese bikes come of age – 800NK stands ruddy close to established rivals								
800NK Sport	**£6999**	**799cc twin**	**130mph***	**94bhp****	**45mpg***	Basically it's KTM 790 Duke with a few different parts and fresh looks. It's good and it's cheap.	**8/10**	**Nov '23**
700CL-X Heritage	**£6999**	**693cc twin**	**117mph**	**64bhp****	**55mpg**	Chirpy, fun, usable, good spec, long warranty. It's good… but no longer cheap next to finer rivals.	**7/10**	**Mar '23**
DUCATI ducatiuk.com, 0845 718500 *Bike's* choice: effective, fun and funky, the DesertX is so damn desirable								
Panigale V4 R	**£39,151**	**998cc V4**	**195mph***	**215bhp****	**35mpg****	Screaming, sharp, ballistic homologation tool. Amazing. But cheaper S is as good for most of us.	**8/10**	**Nov '23**
Diavel V4	**£23,751**	**1158cc V4**	**150mph***	**166bhp****	**44mpg****	Caricature looks, raked stance, wild power, silly tail lights. And amazing. Not for everyone, mind.	**8/10**	**Apr '23**
Multistrada V4 Rally	**£20,651**	**1158cc V4**	**155mph***	**170bhp****	**43mpg****	Most sophisticated, rounded, clever Ducati ever. Staggeringly complete. Pricey, yes. Also epic.	**10/10**	**Nov '23**
Panigale V4 S	**£27,651**	**1103cc V4**	**191mph**	**203bhp**	**39mpg**	Stupid-fast, sharp, needs working to get the best out, but still feels mega to 'normal' folk. Wow.	**9/10**	**Feb '22**
Streetfighter V4 S	**£23,661**	**1103cc V4**	**169mph**	**181bhp**	**34mpg**	Fast, sexy, loud, desirable… but constantly a full-on experience. SP2 version (£32k) even sillier.	**8/10**	**Jul '24**
Scrambler 1100 Pro	**£12,051**	**1079cc V-twin**	**110mph***	**83bhp****	**45mpg***	1100 Evo-engined, easy-riding Scrambler has charming twin and more comfort than 800s.	**8/10**	**Nov '22**
Panigale V2	**£16,951**	**955cc V-twin**	**169mph**	**140bhp**	**45mpg**	'Entry-level' superbike is fast yet friendly, focused yet usable. Better for most than the hairy V4.	**9/10**	**May '22**
Streetfighter V2	**£16,151**	**955cc V-twin**	**160mph***	**151bhp****	**45mpg***	Stripped-down Pani' V2 makes more sense than its wild V4 sibling. Still stiff and sporty, mind.	**8/10**	**Aug '22**
Multistrada V2 S	**£15,551**	**937cc V-twin**	**135mph**	**111bhp**	**48mpg****	It's proper: eager motor, easy handling, effective semi-active ride, manageable, classy. Mega.	**9/10**	**Jan '22**
DesertX	**£14,951**	**937cc V-twin**	**130mph***	**110bhp****	**41mpg**	Sexy dual-purpose tool perfectly balances road and off-road needs. Our 2022 Bike of the Year.	**10/10**	**Oct '22**
SuperSport 950	**£14,251**	**937cc V-twin**	**145mph***	**113bhp****	**43mpg**	Not super fast or whizzpop, but a top, usable, sporty (and overlooked) road bike for normal folk.	**9/10**	**Jan '18**
Monster	**£11,451**	**937cc V-twin**	**135mph***	**110bhp****	**45mpg***	Light, fun, usable, quality roadster with badge appeal. Mega. SP (£14k) sharper but less usable.	**10/10**	**Feb '22**
Scrambler Icon	**£10,160**	**803cc V-twin**	**123mph**	**72bhp***	**47mpg**	Image and quality matched by much-improved dynamic. Easy in town, great on back roads.	**8/10**	**Jan '24**
Hyper' 698 Mono	**£12,067**	**659cc single**	**123mph**	**76bhp****	**59mpg**	Fruitiest single ever is light, responsive, engaging. But it craves twisty roads and a skilled rider.	**8/10**	**Oct '24**
ENERGICA motocorsa.co.uk, 01747 811196 *Bike's* choice: they build a sportsbike, but Esse Esse makes more sense in cluttered UK								
Eva Esse Esse9	**£24,590**	**electric motor**	**125mph****	**87bhp**	**60mpc**	Great acceleration, response, quality. Cheaper than was, but still pricey. Got a charging point?	**7/10**	**Aug '18**
Eva Ribelle	**£26,690**	**electric motor**	**123mph**	**144bhp**	**112mpc**	Performance and handling to rival (most) petrol supernakeds. Best road-going electric bike.	**7/10**	**Apr '20**

Champs first time out

» Imagine KTM or Husqvarna wheeling out a new sportsbike and winning British Superbikes at their first bash. That's the equivalent of what Ducati have just done in motocross, claiming the Italian MX1 Motocross series with their new Desmo450 MX and rider Alessandro Lupino. They'll race the single-cylinder four-stroke in GPs in 2025, with a new 250 doing the Italian series. What next? Trials bikes? Ooh, maybe bagger racing…

ROAD TEST BACK ISSUES

BLUE = Available just on iPad
RED = Available on iPad and Android
ORANGE = Available in print only

** *Claimed* * *Estimated*

BIKE	PRICE	ENGINE	TOP SPEED	POWER	MPG	BIKE VERDICT	RATING	TESTED
FANTIC fanticmotoruk.com *Bike's* choice: there are three versions of the Cabellero, but just go for the best colour (so that's the Scrambler)								
Caballero 700	£9499	689cc twin	115mph*	74bhp**	46mpg*	Retro scrambler built around Yam's great MT-07 motor. Good, has its moments… but not ace.	7/10	Jan '24
Caballero 500	£6749	449cc single	100mph*	43bhp**	60mpg	Rev-happy, ex-enduro single in a light, good-quality package. Frantic on long rides, but top fun.	8/10	Oct '19
HARLEY-DAVIDSON harley-davidson.com, 0871 6412508 *Bike's* choice: the Fat Bob has looks, finish, good ride… and funny name								
CVO Street Glide	£38,177	1868cc V-twin	115mph*	80bhp*	50mpg	Bold, loud, glitzy, pricey. Most refined and usable big H-D twin yet, let down by choppy ride.	8/10	Nov '17
Low Rider S	£19,677	1868cc V-twin	115mph	93bhp*	50mpg**	Top looks and noise, more fun to ride than you think. But better in California than Croydon.	6/10	Jan '20
Ultra Limited	£30,277	1745cc V-twin	105mph*	67bhp*	43mpg	H-D take on a tourer. Best-ever ride and handling, water-cooled heads. Good, if not ace.	7/10	Nov '13
LiveWire	£28,995	electric motor	115mph*	104bhp**	90mpc	Rapid, jet-like noise, fine handling, smooth, expensive. Soon to be branded LiveWire, not H-D.	7/10	Oct '19
Road Glide CVO Anniv'	£50,677	1923cc V-twin	105mph*	105bhp**	43mpg**	The defining H-D full-dress tourer with extra bling. Luxurious, surprising, expensive… unique.	8/10	Sep '23
Street Glide Special	£28,077	1745cc V-twin	115mph*	40bhp*	45mpg*	Classic looks, decent suspension, good finish and latest 8v motor is the best yet. Fine thing.	8/10	Dec '16
Sport Glide	£18,177	1745cc V-twin	116mph	99bhp	51mpg	Hammering engine, civil road manners. One of the most appealing H-Ds – and now cheaper.	7/10	Sep '18
Fat Bob	£19,277	1745cc V-twin	115mph*	75bhp*	44mpg**	Bold looks, fine details, huge punch, and surprisingly usable. There's an 1868cc option too.	8/10	Feb '18
Breakout	£24,477	1745cc V-twin	115mph*	75bhp*	50mpg**	Low-slung, drag-inspired cruiser that rides better than expected. Classy, refined hot-rod.	8/10	Dec '17
Street Bob	£16,977	1745cc V-twin	110mph*	75bhp*	50mpg**	Classic chopper-ish lines, clean handling, modern 8v power. But Fat Bob is far better.	6/10	Dec '17
Softail Standard	£16,277	1745cc V-twin	110mph*	86bhp**	48mpg	Harley's entry-level bike is £13k. It's a meat-and-potatoes Harley – charming, but limited ability.	6/10	Jun '21
Pan America Special	£19,177	1252cc V-twin	135mph**	148bhp**	43mpg	Comfy, composed, brisk, lots of equipment. Very good, but not quite a GS or Multistrada rival.	8/10	Sep '21
Sportster S	£16,177	1252cc V-twin	120mph*	119bhp**	50mpg	Fastest, smoothest, best handling, most techy Harley cruiser ever. Ace… but lacks the H-D feel.	8/10	Nov '21
HONDA honda.co.uk/motorcycles, 0845 2008000 *Bike's* choice: Hornet's good, Blade's epic… but have you ridden an NT1100? Great tool								
GL1800 Gold Wing Tour	£29,349	1833cc flat-six	112mph	125bhp**	51mpg	Huge, OTT, but smart suspension, toys and utter refinement mean it's still the grand-tour king.	8/10	Dec '22
CBR1000RR-R Blade SP	£23,499	1000cc inline 4	185mph*	215bhp**	42mpg**	Wild HRC-polished race rep is demanding and pointless. But also hi-tech, classy and exquisite.	9/10	Jul '24
Africa Twin Adv' Sport	£14,749	1084cc twin	130mph*	94bhp	44mpg	All the tech, plush optional semi-active, classy feel, huge range. And daft switchgear. Hey-ho.	9/10	Nov '24
Africa Twin	£13,049	1084cc twin	130mph*	94bhp	47mpg	Feels like a big, refined enduro bike, so is different to a GS. Cheaper too. Daft switches and dash.	8/10	Jul '24
NT1100	£12,499	1084cc twin	123mph	97bhp	52mpg	Cross between Africa Twin and Deauville. Not exciting, but a high-spec, super-comfy tourer.	9/10	May '24
CMX1100 Rebel	£9599	1084cc twin	125mph*	86bhp**	52mpg	Africa Twin motor in cheery, usable, well-made cruiser. Not plush, but fun and very affordable.	8/10	Jan '22
CB1000R	£11,649	998cc inline 4	145mph	135bhp	46mpg	Fast, luxurious, fabulous quality – and has a touch of the soul Honda have been lacking. Nice.	8/10	Dec '21
XL750 Transalp	£9499	755cc twin	135mph*	91bhp*	58mpg	Smooth, easy to ride, great ergonomics, and cool colours. But revvy twin doesn't suit the bike.	8/10	Aug '23
CB750 Hornet	£6999	755cc twin	140mph*	91bhp**	65mpg**	Simple, honest, fun, great spec, class-leading power – and affordable too. But GSX-8S is nicer…	9/10	Jul '23
X-ADV	£11,099	745cc twin	105mph*	54bhp**	70mpg*	Off-road scooter you'll never take off-road. Pricey too. But also practical, enjoyable and top fun.	8/10	Dec '18
Forza 750	£10,399	745cc twin	110mph*	54bhp**	70mpg	Capable bike with looks and practicality of a scooter. And DCT. Odd concept, ace execution.	9/10	May '21
NC750X	£7849	745cc twin	115mph*	58bhp**	70mpg	Flexible twin, big mpg, agile, clever storage. Not flash, but very useful. DCT (£830) is worth it.	10/10	Nov '21
CBR650R E-Clutch	£8699	649cc inline 4	138mph	86bhp	54mpg	Flexible, handsome, fun, fast-enough road sportsbike. Smart auto clutch is genuinely useful.	8/10	Aug '24
CB650R	£7699	649cc inline 4	140mph	93bhp**	50mpg	Naked version of CBR (above) is fabulously balanced. Quality, dynamic, value all superb.	9/10	May '19
CBR600RR	£10,499	599cc inline 4	170mph*	119bhp**	52mpg**	Shrieking power, epic agility, pinpoint steering, top quality. Tiny and demanding, yes. But mega.	9/10	Oct '24
CB500X	£6699	471cc twin	110mph*	43bhp	68mpg*	Well-made, able, A2 adventure bike. Naked F (£6099) and faired R (£6599) are even nicer.	7/10	May '19
CRF300L	£5749	286cc single	80mph*	27bhp**	70mpg*	Fit green-laner, easy commuter, bit quicker than old 250. Rally (£6499) has big tank and screen.	7/10	Aug '22
Super Cub	£3749	125cc single	65mph*	9.2bhp	124mpg	Descendent of iconic step-thru' is charming. Ownership by urban folk should be compulsory.	8/10	Jul '19
HUSQVARNA husqvarnamotorcycles.com/gb *Bike's* choice: Supermoto is desirable, funky, silly… and yet usable day-to-day								
Norden 901	£12,699	889cc twin	130mph*	103bhp**	63mpg**	Attractive reworking of KTM 890 Adventure. Capable, nicely made, but lacks a 'wow' moment.	7/10	Oct '22
701 Supermoto	£9799	693cc single	121mph	71bhp	54mpg	Engaging, fun at sensible speed, frugal, sexy, friendlier than it looks. Proper midweight tool.	9/10	Sep '17
701 Enduro	£9799	693cc single	120mph*	71bhp	54mpg	Proper dirt bike, yet refined, frugal and plush on the road. Big-tank LR (long range) version, too.	9/10	Apr '19
Svartpilen 401	£5499	375cc single	105mph*	43bhp**	65mpg*	Built for A2 riders avoiding the mainstream. Essentially KTM's fine 390 Duke with more style.	7/10	Jul '18
INDIAN indianmotorcycle.co.uk *Bike's* choice: classic character, modern quality, unique feel – Scout is a standout cruiser								
Roadmaster	£28,295	1890cc V-twin	110mph*	89bhp*	40mpg*	Fully-loaded, over-the-top celebration of trad' USA touring opulence is actually very good.	7/10	May '15
Chief Dark Horse	£17,495	1890cc V-twin	120mph*	89bhp*	60mpg	Big twin has stripped-back cool, walloping drive, surprising agility. Engaging trad' cruiser.	8/10	Feb '24
Challenger	£26,795	1770cc V-twin	112mph**	122bhp*	46mpg*	Full-on tourer with ace water-cooled motor, physics-defying chassis, full tech. Watch out, H-D.	8/10	Jan '20
101 Scout	£16,095	1250cc V-twin	120mph	110bhp	40mpg*	Impressive mix of trad' cruiser flair and sporty (ish) credentials. Engaging, amusing, classy.	8/10	Aug '24
FTR1200R Carbon	£16,695	1203cc V-twin	140mph*	123bhp**	38mpg	Stylish, high-quality, sporty retro with ace V-twin. We preferred it with the old 19in wheel, mind.	8/10	Nov '22
KAWASAKI kawasaki.co.uk, 01628 856750 *Bike's* choice: has to be the Ninja Z H2. Friendly, usable, yet suitably deranged								
Versys 1000 SE GT	£17,435	1043cc inline 4	144mph	118bhp**	42mpg	Top-spec Versys with all the toys, luxurious ride, luggage… Ace two-up tourer, but expensive.	7/10	Feb '24
Versys 1000 S	£13,745	1043cc inline 4	144mph	114bhp	47mpg	High-rise, high-spec 'adventure tourer' is great. Not much of a looker, mind. Very overlooked.	8/10	Aug '22
Ninja 1000SX	£12,515	1043cc inline 4	149mph	140bhp**	42mpg	The UK's fave sports-tourer is smooth, refined, well equipped. Looks a bit dated, but still cuts it.	9/10	May '22
Ninja H2 SX SE	£25,815	998cc inline 4	186mph*	197bhp**	39mpg	Sports-touring exotica. Not perfect, but classy, usable, and that motor… Base H2 SX is £21,735.	8/10	Jun '19
Z H2 SE	£19,965	998cc inline 4	175mph*	197bhp**	34mpg	The impressive Z H2 (below) with fine semi-active ride. It's the thinking rider's supernaked.	9/10	Jul '21
Z H2	£17,465	998cc inline 4	175mph*	197bhp**	34mpg	Mega blown H2 motor in bespoke naked chassis. Far more road focus than supernaked rivals.	8/10	Oct '20
Ninja ZX-10RR	£24,955	998cc inline 4	180mph	189bhp	44mpg	The already-capable ZX-10R with tuned motor and fancy wheels: basically a base for racing.	9/10	Jun '18

Run out of juice

» They've led the way in electric bikes and supplied machines for the MotoE world championship. And now Energica have gone bust, despite recent decent sales and hefty investment from American electrification outfit Ideanomics. Having started designing battery bikes in 2009 and setting up the company in 2014, the Italian firm reckons a 'crisis in the electric market and the decline in sector investments' is to blame.

Listings

ROAD TEST BACK ISSUES

BLUE = Available just on iPad
RED = Available on iPad and Android
ORANGE = Available in print only

** *Claimed* * *Estimated*

BIKE	PRICE	ENGINE	TOP SPEED	POWER	MPG	BIKE VERDICT	RATING	TESTED
Ninja ZX-10R	**£17,665**	**998cc inline 4**	**185mph**	**185bhp**	**52mpg**	Amazing race-derived motor, handling, electronics. Performance model (Akra' can) is £1k extra.	**9/10**	**Mar '23**
Z900RS	**£11,965**	**948cc inline 4**	**143mph**	**102bhp**	**51mpg**	Z900 in retro clobber. And better for it – dynamic, feel and detail are great. SE (£13k) even better.	**8/10**	**Nov '22**
Z900	**£9865**	**948cc inline 4**	**145mph***	**123bhp****	**52mpg****	If you grew up on inline fours, this is ace. Not as punchy as MT-09, but very good and well priced.	**7/10**	**Sep '17**
Z650RS	**£8115**	**649cc twin**	**130mph***	**67bhp****	**65mpg****	Spot-on mix of modern Z650's abilities with cool '70s retro vibe. £150 extra for green? Worth it.	**8/10**	**Jan '22**
Versys 650	**£8415**	**649cc twin**	**115mph***	**62bhp***	**54mpg***	Twin-cylinder all-rounder is knocking on, but latest extras keep it valid. Fine multi-purpose tool.	**8/10**	**Aug '22**
Vulcan S	**£7615**	**649cc twin**	**115mph***	**61bhp****	**63mpg***	Affordable, good-looking, modern cruiser with ER-6 power. Surprising ability, keen price.	**8/10**	**Jan '22**
Ninja 650	**£7815**	**649cc twin**	**130mph***	**67bhp****	**70mpg***	Z650 dressed up in ZX-10R costume. Comfy, easy-to-ride, cheery twin for J. Rea wannabes.	**9/10**	**May '17**
Z650	**£7665**	**649cc twin**	**130mph***	**67bhp****	**70mpg***	Zed is fun, fit, frugal. Nice, but lacks sparkle next to a Hornet, MT-07 or Trident. It's knocking on…	**7/10**	**May '23**
KTM ktm.co.uk *Bike's* choice: practical, verging on sensible, but also very silly. It's the 890 SMT for us, please								
Super Adventure R	**£17,299**	**1301cc V-twin**	**155mph***	**158bhp****	**44mpg**	Like a rocket-powered 'crosser with cruise, Bluetooth and comfort. Mega… but Multi' V4 better.	**9/10**	**Nov '23**
1290 Super Duke GT	**£18,799**	**1301cc V-twin**	**159mph**	**158bhp**	**45mpg**	Mad power, sports handling, all the toys and eats miles. Couple of iffy bits, otherwise ace.	**9/10**	**Jan '19**
1390 Super Duke R Evo	**£19,599**	**1350cc V-twin**	**165mph**	**178bhp**	**42mpg**	Mighty fast yet friendly, sharp but safe, and loads of gizmos. Surprisingly usable supernaked.	**9/10**	**Mar '23**
990 Duke	**£12,999**	**947cc twin**	**145mph***	**121bhp****	**60mpg****	More mature and finer quality than earlier Dukes, but still loopy. KTM's best naked… but pricey.	**9/10**	**Jan '25**
890 SMT	**£12,499**	**899cc twin**	**130mph****	**103bhp***	**63mpg**	Sharper and more engaging than an adventure bike, more practical than a naked. And a bit silly.	**8/10**	**Feb '24**
890 Adventure	**£11,999**	**889cc twin**	**130mph***	**103bhp****	**63mpg****	The previous 790 with extra bhp, smoother delivery, tweaked chassis, more tech. Very good.	**8/10**	**Jan '21**
690 Enduro R	**£9799**	**690cc single**	**115mph***	**73bhp****	**60mpg***	Super-clever Duke/Husky 701 lump in long-legged trailie. Pukka, classy, dual-purpose tool.	**8/10**	**Feb '16**
390 Adventure	**£6299**	**373cc single**	**105mph***	**43bhp****	**56mpg**	Chirpy A2-legal adventurer looks like a 1290 (sort of). But it's basically a 390 Duke in wellies.	**8/10**	**Jul '20**
390 Duke	**£5499**	**373cc single**	**108mph**	**41bhp**	**70mpg***	Revvy, eager motor in agile 125 chassis? Yes. Looks like the 1290 and less toy-like than it was.	**7/10**	**Jun '17**
LANGEN langenmotorcycles.co.uk; 01942 724059 *Bike's* choice: there's one model, which limits choice. Luckily it's amazing								
Two Stroke	**£32,580**	**249cc V-twin**	**130mph***	**74bhp****	**40mpg***	Pricey, yes. But stroker is deliciously engineered, fast, raw. We love it… but 33k is a lot for a 250.	**8/10**	**Dec '23**
MASH mashmotorcycles.co.uk; 01264 889012 *Bike's* choice: go for the X-Ride (but budget for new tyres and suspension)								
650 X-Ride	**£5759**	**644cc single**	**90mph***	**40bhp****	**60mpg***	Ex-Honda Dominator motor in 70s-style trailie. Good quality, keen price, let down by chassis.	**5/10**	**Apr '21**
Five Hundred 400	**£4455**	**398cc single**	**80mph***	**28bhp****	**70mpg****	French brand, made in China, Honda-based motor. Iffy details, odd name, but cheap and fun.	**6/10**	**Dec '17**
MOTO GUZZI uk.motoguzzi.it *Bike's* choice: unique image, sweet ride, classy quality; it's not fast or clever but V85 is lovely								
V100 Mandello S	**£15,750**	**1042cc V-twin**	**135mph***	**108bhp**	**50mpg**	Sports-tourer is classy, comfy, capable, charismatic. Serious alternative to a Honda or BMW.	**9/10**	**Sep '23**
Stelvio	**£14,700**	**1042cc V-twin**	**135mph***	**113bhp****	**50mpg***	Brilliant V100 (above) in capable, classy, convincing adventure guise. Not a GS, but very good.	**9/10**	**Nov '24**
V85 TT	**£12,000**	**853cc V-twin**	**120mph***	**79bhp****	**50mpg***	Fabulous adventure mix of old-school charm, proper tech, comfort, and a cheerful dynamic.	**9/10**	**May '24**
V85 Strada	**£11,200**	**853cc V-twin**	**120mph***	**79bhp***	**50mph***	Stripped-back V85 has less tech, fewer fixings, but lighter wheels for sharper handling. Decent.	**8/10**	**May '24**
V9 Bobber	**£9600**	**853cc V-twin**	**110mph***	**64bhp****	**55mpg***	Pleasing V-twin in a trendy, well-made package. Doesn't sell well so haggle yourself a top deal.	**8/10**	**Jun '16**
V7 Special	**£8600**	**853cc V-twin**	**115mph***	**64bhp****	**63mpg**	Style, ride and badge all spot-on. 850 V-twin isn't as grunty as a Street Twin, but we forgive it.	**9/10**	**Jul '21**
MOTO MORINI motomorini.eu *Bike's* choice: you might need to be brave, but the Milano is a convincingly authentic Morini								
Milano	**£12,700**	**1187cc V-twin**	**145mph***	**114bhp****	**42mpg**	Instant chunky power, firm and direct chassis, neat 70s paint. Buying is a gamble, but it's cool.	**8/10**	**Nov '19**
X-Cape	**£6999**	**649cc twin**	**109mph***	**59bhp****	**49mpg**	Made in China with CFMoto engine. Great spec, good quality, rides well. No Ténéré, but cheap.	**7/10**	**Mar '22**
MV AGUSTA mvagusta.co.uk, 0844 4128450 *Bike*'s choice: latest Brutale is refined, usable, yet still exotic								
Enduro Veloce	**£20,000**	**931cc inline 3**	**149mph****	**122bhp****	**40mpg***	Fast, accurate, inspiring, surprisingly complete adventurer. But no use on trails. Expensive too.	**7/10**	**Jan '25**
Dragster 800 RR SCS	**£18,220**	**798cc inline 3**	**150mph***	**138bhp***	**45mpg**	Expensive, yes. But also classy, high-spec, comfy, and refined like no MV before. Impressive.	**8/10**	**Jan '22**
Superveloce	**£18,980**	**798cc inline 3**	**160mph***	**146bhp****	**41mpg**	Super-sporty F3 in semi-retro dress. Fast, sharp, sounds top, looks superb, quite demanding.	**8/10**	**Mar '23**
Turismo Veloce Rosso	**£13,930**	**798cc inline 3**	**136mph**	**110bhp****	**48mpg***	Adventure bike? Nah, it's like a high-rise sportsbike. So-so ride, busy dash, but it's good.	**8/10**	**Jan '19**
F3 800 Rosso	**£14,840**	**798cc inline 3**	**161mph**	**148bhp****	**34mpg***	Crisp, punchy, trim. Easier on the road than a 600 but still focused – needs a track to really shine.	**8/10**	**Apr '14**
Brutale 800 RR	**£15,590**	**798cc inline 3**	**153mph****	**138bhp****	**40mpg****	Top engine, nimble, great looks, ridiculous hard ride. Semi-auto clutch version a bit gimmicky.	**6/10**	**Apr '19**
NORTON nortonmotorcycles.com; 0121 565 4411 *Bike's* choice: Think Norton, think Commando… and it's good to ride, too								
V4SV	**£44,000**	**1200cc V4**	**180mph***	**185bhp****	**40mpg***	Not as slick as an M1000RR, expensive. So what? Brit sportsbike is solid, fast, beautiful, unique.	**8/10**	**Dec '23**
V4CR	**£42,000**	**1200cc V4**	**175mph***	**185bhp****	**40mpg***	Sculpted café racer is modern and old-school at the same time. Pricey but effective exotica.	**9/10**	**Oct '23**
Commando 961 SP	**£16,999**	**961cc twin**	**125mph***	**77bhp****	**40mpg***	Traditional pushrod Brit twin for the modern world. Sweet handling, well made, lots of character.	**9/10**	**Mar '23**
ROYAL ENFIELD royalenfield.com/uk; 0844 412 8450 *Bike's* choice: Himalayan 450 is a superb mix of performance, quality and price								
Continental GT	**£6799**	**648cc twin**	**110mph***	**44bhp**	**60mpg***	Café racer has flexible motor, light handling, keen price – but Inter' version (below) is nicer.	**8/10**	**Apr '19**
Interceptor	**£6599**	**648cc twin**	**110mph**	**44bhp**	**60mpg**	Charming twin has authentic feel, fine looks and attractive price. Think Indian-made Guzzi V7.	**9/10**	**Mar '23**
Himalayan 450	**£5850**	**452cc single**	**90mph***	**40bhp****	**78mpg****	Rugged, functional appeal, now with more oomph and improved ride and quality. Great bike.	**9/10**	**Jul '24**
Classic	**£4619**	**349cc single**	**72mph**	**19bhp**	**79mpg**	The hugely successful Meteor dressed up like an old Bullet. Easy-going basic Sunday plodder.	**7/10**	**Aug '22**
Meteor	**£4219**	**349cc single**	**72mph**	**19bhp**	**79mpg**	Simple, chirpy character, light handling, nicely made, and super cheap. Fast? No way. Fun? Yes.	**8/10**	**Nov '21**
SUZUKI suzuki-gb.co.uk; 0845 850 8800 *Bike's* choice: V-Strom 800DE is everything a mid-size adventure should be								
Hayabusa	**£18,165**	**1340cc inline 4**	**186mph***	**187bhp****	**42mpg****	There are more powerful bikes. But nothing goes stupid fast with the ease and class of a Busa.	**8/10**	**Jul '22**
V-Strom 1050XT	**£13,865**	**1037cc V-twin**	**137mph**	**99bhp**	**52mpg**	Loads of gizmos, amazing screen, plush-yet-secure ride, solid motor. It's no GS… but top value.	**8/10**	**Dec '20**
GSX-S1000GX	**£14,499**	**999cc inline 4**	**145mph****	**150bhp***	**45mpg***	The GT (below) in adventure-sports guise. Not perfect, but ace suspension, toys, ride and feel..	**8/10**	**May '24**
GSX-S1000GT	**£11,665**	**999cc inline 4**	**155mph***	**150bhp***	**46mpg****	GSX-R power, all-day comfort, lots of toys and good-looking, too. Trad' sports-tourers are back.	**8/10**	**May '22**
Katana	**£12,465**	**999cc inline 4**	**152mph**	**147bhp**	**46mpg**	Superb GSX-S supernaked with sharp 80s-inspired styling. Bold yet usable, and underrated.	**8/10**	**Nov '19**

It's only weather

» Next year's BSB series starts with a sunny test at Navarra in Spain, with the first round at Oulton Park in May. Spring will have sprung and it'll all be lovely. The racing season didn't used to let minor insignificances like the weather get in the way, though. This is front-running Brit privateer and GP points-scorer Chris Guy on his Suzuki RG500 at Cadwell. This was handy practice – he had to endure a snowy paddock at the 1982 Austrian GP.

*** Claimed* ** Estimated*

BIKE	PRICE	ENGINE	TOP SPEED	POWER	MPG	BIKE VERDICT	RATING	TESTED
V-Strom 800DE	**£10,665**	**776cc twin**	**125mph***	**83bhp****	**52mpg**	Gutsy motor, proper comfort, better suspension than rivals, and fine spec list too. Great bike.	**9/10**	**Aug '23**
GSX-8R	**£8899**	**776cc twin**	**130mph***	**82bhp****	**52mpg***	Think GSX-R mixed with a commuter. Easy to ride, friendly, but also grunty, agile, plush. Lovely.	**9/10**	**Dec '24**
GSX-8S	**£8299**	**776cc twin**	**130mph***	**82bhp****	**50mpg***	Usable grunt, secure handling, fine ride, nicely made. Pricier than MT-07 and Hornet, but better.	**9/10**	**Jul '23**
V-Strom 650 XT	**£8965**	**645cc V-twin**	**115mph***	**60bhp***	**45mpg**	£700 over the base model (below) gets you hand guards and wire wheels. Worth it for the looks.	**7/10**	**Jul '17**
SV650	**£7165**	**645cc V-twin**	**122mph**	**74bhp**	**50mpg**	Chirpy, cheerful, usable, quick, proven, though Yam MT-07 has a bit more zip and charm.	**7/10**	**Apr '19**
GSX-R125	**£5078**	**124cc single**	**80mph***	**15bhp****	**123mpg****	Perky motor, better power-to-weight than rivals, and cheaper. Won't suit big-boned, mind.	**9/10**	**Nov '17**
TRIUMPH triumphmotorcycles.co.uk *Bike's* choice: Speed Twin 1200 isn't perfect, but it's flippin' compelling								
Rocket 3 GT	**£22,695**	**2458cc inline 3**	**138mph****	**165bhp****	**35mpg**	Huge motor is amazing, handling is ridiculous, but firm ride and sheer bulk limit use as 'real' GT.	**8/10**	**May '21**
Rocket 3 R	**£21,995**	**2458cc inline 3**	**138mph****	**165bhp****	**35mpg**	Cruiser? Hardly. With a stiff chassis, handling and crazy grunt, the R is a Mad Max supernaked.	**8/10**	**Feb '21**
Tiger 1200 Rally Pro	**£18,295**	**1200cc inline 3**	**140mph***	**148bhp****	**55mpg****	Lots of power, tech, comfort and class, and they've stopped the vibes, too. Well done, Triumph.	**9/10**	**Aug '24**
Thruxton RS	**£14,195**	**1200cc twin**	**130mph***	**103bhp****	**50mpg**	Trad' charm and neat details with punching, revvy twin, track-able chassis and premium finish.	**9/10**	**Mar '20**
Scrambler 1200 XE	**£13,295**	**1200cc twin**	**130mph***	**89bhp****	**56mpg**	Easy-going B-lane thrummer is classy, rewarding, sensibly priced. Think retro adventure bike.	**8/10**	**Jan '25**
Speedmaster	**£12,995**	**1200cc twin**	**110mph***	**76bhp****	**55mpg****	Low-slung Bobber transformed for the USA with beach 'bars, shiny bits and pillion perch.	**8/10**	**Sep '18**
Bonneville Bobber	**£12,995**	**1200cc twin**	**120mph***	**77bhp****	**56mpg**	Oodles of grunt, capable chassis, spot-on stance and feel. Perfect blend of modern and retro.	**9/10**	**Jan '22**
Speed Twin 1200	**£11,795**	**1200cc twin**	**130mph***	**96bhp****	**50mpg**	Retro-supernaked has mighty grunt and sharp chassis with flat-cap looks. Great, but a bit… lost.	**8/10**	**Nov '22**
Bonneville T120	**£11,795**	**1200cc twin**	**120mph***	**79bhp****	**54mpg**	Lolloping grunt, steadfast chassis, top finish. Hasn't Street Twin's agility, but has finer ride.	**9/10**	**Sep '18**
Speed Triple RR	**£17,950**	**1160cc inline 3**	**150mph**	**166bhp**	**39mpg**	RS (below) with retro fairing, GSX-R riding position and posh suspension. Nicer than the naked.	**8/10**	**Jun '22**
Speed Triple RS	**£15,795**	**1160cc inline 3**	**175mph***	**178bhp****	**38mpg**	Awesome motor, ace outright handling, full tech. But too stiff and focused for the road. Shame.	**8/10**	**Nov '21**
Scrambler 900	**£9795**	**900cc twin**	**110mph***	**54bhp****	**60mpg**	The Bonnie platform in laid-back, urban-ready scrambler form. Charming, if a little bit 'meh'.	**7/10**	**Jan '24**
Bonneville T100	**£9595**	**900cc twin**	**110mph***	**54bhp****	**60mpg**	All the style and easy-going pleasures of the T120. Makes 24bhp less, but is £1900 (!) cheaper.	**9/10**	**Sep '18**
Speed Twin 900	**£8795**	**900cc twin**	**110mph***	**64bhp****	**60mpg**	Handsome, pleasing, well-made retro with decent grunt and easy-to-flick chassis. Really good.	**9/10**	**Dec '22**
Tiger 900 Rally Pro	**£14,495**	**888cc inline 3**	**130mph***	**106bhp****	**60mpg****	High-tech, high-spec adventurer really can go (almost) anywhere. Brisk, smooth, plush, lovely.	**9/10**	**Mar '24**
Tiger 900 GT Pro	**£13,895**	**888cc inline 3**	**130mph***	**106bhp****	**60mpg****	Great spec, comfort, usability, quality. Top adventurer-tourer, but Rally (above) has more pizazz.	**9/10**	**Nov '24**
Tiger 850 Sport	**£10,095**	**888cc inline 3**	**125mph***	**84bhp****	**49mpg**	Confusingly, 850 is actually the base Tiger 900. Lowest power, fewest toys, but decent enough.	**8/10**	**Apr '23**
Street Triple 765 RS	**£11,295**	**765cc inline 3**	**145mph***	**128bhp****	**53mpg****	Best road-going sporty bike Triumph have ever made. Ace. Less-blingy R (£10,295) is great too.	**9/10**	**Oct '24**
Tiger Sport 660	**£8945**	**660cc inline 3**	**135mph***	**80bhp****	**60mpg****	660 Trident repackaged as a practical high-riding all-rounder. Giant-slaying brilliance.	**9/10**	**Mar '23**
Daytona 660	**£8595**	**660cc inline 3**	**135mph***	**94bhp****	**58mpg****	Like a three-cylinder CBR650R. Fit motor, comfy, but not a sharp as rivals. Missing an edge.	**8/10**	**Dec '24**
Trident 660	**£7895**	**660cc inline 3**	**129mph**	**75bhp**	**54mpg**	Affordable and friendly like an MT-07, sweet handling like a Street Trip'. Bit stiff, otherwise great..	**9/10**	**May '23**
Scrambler 400 X	**£5595**	**398cc single**	**90mph***	**40bhp****	**80mpg****	Entry model has the right performance and looks. Feel and quality are convincingly Triumph.	**8/10**	**May '24**
VOGE vogeuk.co.uk, 01932 358000 *Bike's* choice: doesn't quite hit the high-end positioning it strives, but 500DS is decent								
500DS	**£5565**	**471cc twin**	**110mph***	**47bhp****	**63mpg**	China's take on Honda's CB500X. Not as good as a CB, but impressive – and great spec for £5k.	**7/10**	**Feb '21**
YAMAHA yamaha-motor.co.uk, 01932 358000 *Bike's* choice: sporty and engaging, yet friendly and fun – MT-09 is a proper device								
R1M	**£24,460**	**998cc inline 4**	**186mph**	**192bhp**	**40mpg**	MotoGP-derived electronics + track-focused superbike = incredible. Limited availability.	**9/10**	**Feb '21**
R1	**£18,810**	**998cc inline 4**	**186mph***	**192bhp**	**40mpg**	Stiff, tall, high geared on road, but raciest of the race reps is special and peerless on track.	**9/10**	**Dec '19**
MT-10 SP	**£16,510**	**998cc inline 4**	**153mph**	**152bhp**	**38mpg**	Already amazing MT-10 with R1 SP's electronic suspenders. Great, if not obviously better.	**9/10**	**May '17**
MT-10	**£14,210**	**998cc inline 4**	**153mph**	**152bhp**	**38mpg**	Not as wild as some rivals, but cheaper, easier to ride, and still epic. Thinking rider's supernaked.	**9/10**	**Aug '22**
Niken GT	**£16,210**	**890cc inline 3**	**117mph**	**113bhp****	**45mpg***	Three-wheeler has more front-end grip than anything, fit motor, fine touring ability Ace, but odd.	**8/10**	**Aug '23**
Tracer 9 GT+	**£14,910**	**890cc inline 3**	**146mph**	**107bhp**	**57mpg**	The defining 'mid-size' upright sports tourer. Not the cheapest, but easily the best. Fabulous.	**10/10**	**Feb '24**
XSR900 GP	**£12,506**	**890cc inline 3**	**135mph***	**117bhp****	**50mpg***	If this is the future of retro, sign us up. XSR in '80s fag-packet sportsbike form is a glorious thing.	**9/10**	**Sep '24**
Tracer 9	**£11,010**	**890cc inline 3**	**146mph**	**107bhp**	**47mpg**	Adventurer presence, comfort, practicality – it's a top road bike. High-spec GT worth the extra.	**9/10**	**Apr '23**
XSR900	**£10,610**	**890cc inline 3**	**130mph**	**107bhp**	**49mpg**	Ace MT-09 reworked into a convincing '80s flat-bar superbike. Cool, fun, sexy, but a bit stiff.	**9/10**	**Nov '22**
MT-09 SP	**£11,310**	**890cc inline 3**	**130mph***	**117bhp****	**48mpg**	Öhlins shock, classy forks, R1M paint job, brilliant engine. Superb everyday semi-supernaked.	**9/10**	**Oct '24**
MT-09	**£10,100**	**890cc inline 3**	**130mph***	**117bhp****	**49mpg***	Top triple has new-found handling prowess and tech, but keeps its usable playfulness. Proper.	**9/10**	**Jan '25**
Ténéré World Raid	**£11,910**	**689cc twin**	**120mph***	**72bhp****	**61mpg**	Mega Ténéré (below) with large tank and tall dirt-biased set-up. Better on trails, worse on road.	**8/10**	**Oct '22**
Ténéré 700	**£10,110**	**689cc twin**	**120mph***	**72bhp****	**55mpg***	Fit MT-07 motor in Dakar-ish chassis. Charms on tarmac, rocks on trails. Tall, light, raw, but ace.	**9/10**	**Aug '23**
Tracer 7	**£8810**	**689cc twin**	**125mph***	**70bhp**	**56mpg**	Super-fun MT-07 with practical niceties. The datum for all-rounder value. GT even better.	**9/10**	**Aug '20**
R7	**£8910**	**689cc twin**	**130mph***	**72bhp****	**56mpg***	More than a faired MT-07. Lacks a bit of wow but properly sporty, ace in corners, fun, affordable.	**8/10**	**Aug '22**
XSR700	**£8260**	**689cc twin**	**119mph**	**70bhp**	**49mpg**	MT-07 in period costume. Proof retro looks can work with a modern dynamic. LC paint is great.	**9/10**	**Jun '16**
MT-07	**£7510**	**689cc twin**	**122mph***	**74bhp**	**48mpg**	Fun, capable, perky, appealing, good value. Great bike, but Honda Hornet makes it feel dated.	**9/10**	**May '23**
R3	**£6405**	**321cc twin**	**102mph***	**41bhp****	**65mpg**	Light, revvy, fun-to-ride, well finished. Ability and spec fight for title of best A2 sportsbike.	**8/10**	**May '19**
R125	**£5302**	**125cc single**	**80mph***	**15bhp**	**92mpg**	R1 looks, big bike feel, clever engine. Easy to see why they sell so many to enthusiastic teens.	**8/10**	**May '19**
ZERO zeromotorcycles.com, +3172 5112014 *Bike's* choice: SR/S is good enough to convert stubborn petrolheads								
SR/S Premium	**£20,495**	**electric motor**	**124mph****	**110bhp****	**242mpc**	Fast, torquey, smooth, hi-spec, great to ride. Range and charge time bearable. Price a bit salty.	**8/10**	**Jul '22**
SR/F Premium	**£19,850**	**electric motor**	**124mph****	**110bhp****	**250mpc**	Quick, decent range, simple to ride, easy to like. Bit drab to look at, usual charging point issues.	**7/10**	**Sep '19**
S	**£14,540**	**electric motor**	**86mph****	**59bhp****	**200mpc**	Simple commuter has basic chassis, slow charging and ain't cheap, but costs peanuts to run.	**6/10**	**Dec '20**

T'ra to a favourite

» Stefano Manzi won the final race of this year's World Supersport championship on a Yamaha R6. Fitting really, given the most successful 600 in the headbanger class won't be racing anymore. With ten riders' titles to its name – including with Brits Cal Crutchlow, Chaz Davies and Sam Lowes – the R6 is being pushed aside by the new three-cylinder R9 for the 2025 season. We'll definitely miss its 16,000rpm howl.

Bike Next month

BEST OF BRITISH

Britain's best-loved revealed: from helmets to tyres, cafés to race meets

» **Amazing engineering:** the greatest (and wildest) British engines

» **Flying the flag:** best-ever British bike revealed…

» **British Superbike:** BMW S1000RR v Honda Fireblade on UK roads

» **Taking on world:** best-selling Triumph Speed 400 v Royal Enfield Guerrilla v Zontes Sports Café

[PLUS]

» Crazy drag action from the Euro finals » Mat Oxley talks to MotoGP hotshot Fabio Di Giannantonio » Country-crossing scooter silliness » BMW F900GS v Voge DS900X » Yamaha XSR900 GP: the verdict

February issue on sale 18th December

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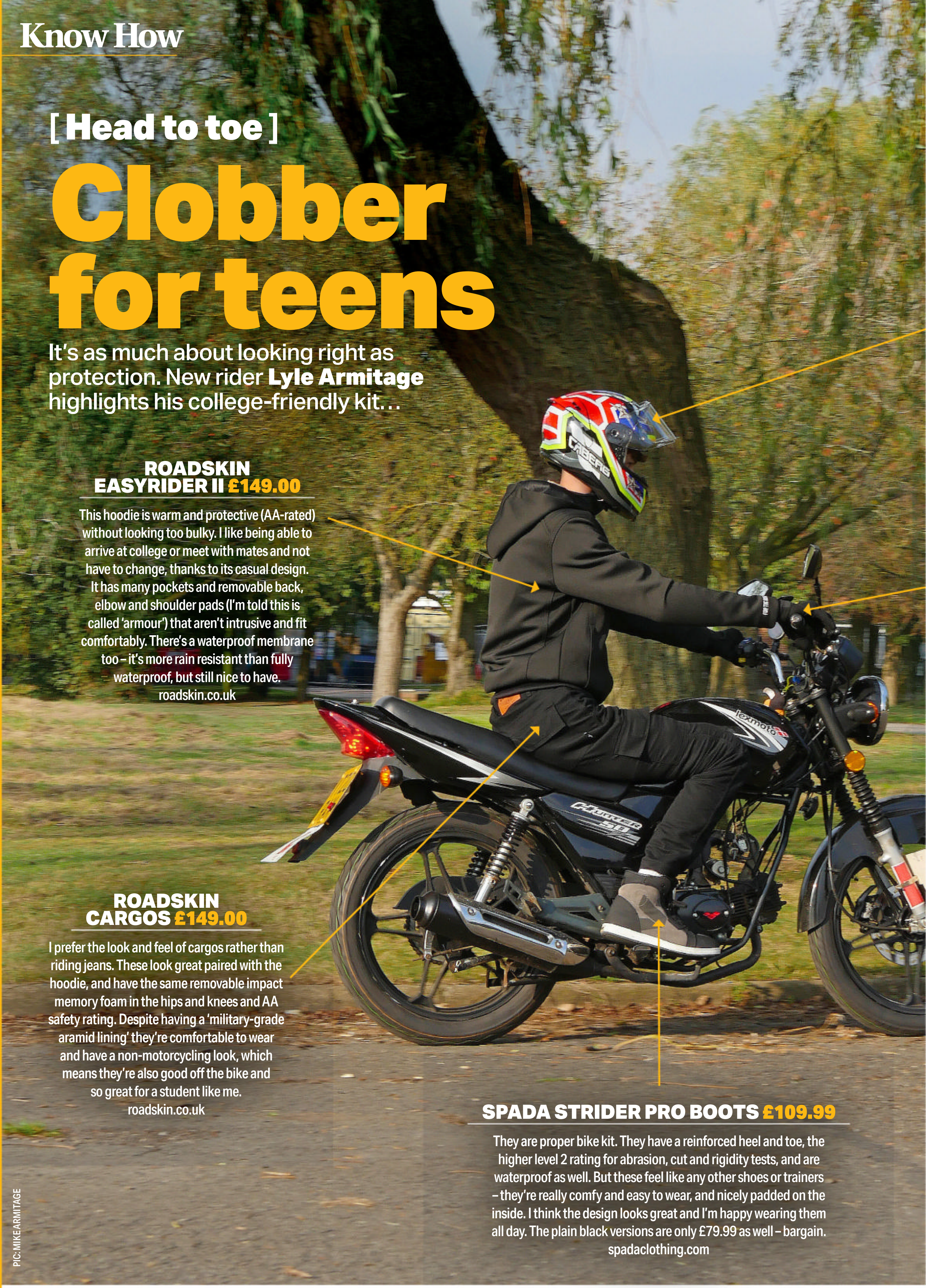
Contact your local Ducati Dealer for more details or visit Ducati.com

DUCATI

[Head to toe]

Clobber for teens

It's as much about looking right as protection. New rider **Lyle Armitage** highlights his college-friendly kit…



ROADSKIN EASYRIDER II £149.00

This hoodie is warm and protective (AA-rated) without looking too bulky. I like being able to arrive at college or meet with mates and not have to change, thanks to its casual design. It has many pockets and removable back, elbow and shoulder pads (I'm told this is called 'armour') that aren't intrusive and fit comfortably. There's a waterproof membrane too – it's more rain resistant than fully waterproof, but still nice to have.
roadskin.co.uk

ROADSKIN CARGOS £149.00

I prefer the look and feel of cargos rather than riding jeans. These look great paired with the hoodie, and have the same removable impact memory foam in the hips and knees and AA safety rating. Despite having a 'military-grade aramid lining' they're comfortable to wear and have a non-motorcycling look, which means they're also good off the bike and so great for a student like me.
roadskin.co.uk

SPADA STRIDER PRO BOOTS £109.99

They are proper bike kit. They have a reinforced heel and toe, the higher level 2 rating for abrasion, cut and rigidity tests, and are waterproof as well. But these feel like any other shoes or trainers – they're really comfy and easy to wear, and nicely padded on the inside. I think the design looks great and I'm happy wearing them all day. The plain black versions are only £79.99 as well – bargain.
spadaclothing.com

PIC: MIKE ARMITAGE

CABERG AVALON X TRACK £174.99

I like being able to pick from so many different designs and colours – there are eight, plus some solid colours. It's very comfy, and the micrometric buckle means it's easy to put on even if you put your gloves on first by mistake (I do that a lot). It's great in hot weather, with various air vents on the front and top plus a sunshade visor that can be switched down, as well as feeling warm and insulated for early-morning rides to college now we have colder days.
cabergcares.co.uk

SPADA SPLASH GLOVES £29.99

These gloves are very light and comfy to wear, but with anti-slip panels in the upper palm giving grip and control. They have rubber padding (more of that 'armour') on the knuckles, thumbs and outer hand, and a waterproof membrane in case of showers. I really like them, although the short cuff isn't great in a downpour and they're too cold to wear during the winter months.
spadaclothing.com

> 'I like that I do not have to change, thanks to casual design'

[Know it all]

Screw threads

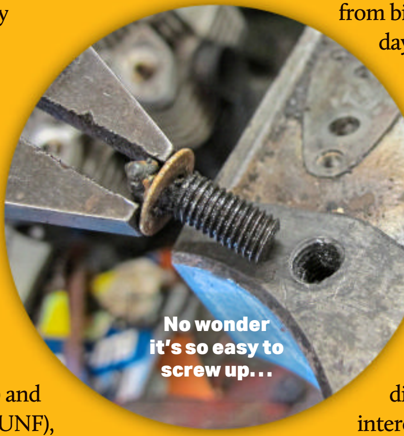
Classic bike engine builder **Rupert Farnsworth** crams his two-hour thread lecture (really) into 300 words

Generally you know where you are with a Japanese bike because all the threads are the same type, although you can get different pitches (the distance between thread crests) for a given size. But when you move into British stuff it gets much more interesting because they use everything.

For example, on my 1971 BSA Lightning [a 650 twin – Ed] you've got British Standard Whitworth – a coarse thread – and British Standard Fine (BSF), the fine version. Then you've got the later American equivalents, Unified National Coarse (UNC) and Unified National Fine (UNF), which started to take over from the British stuff. Because the British and American pitches are mostly the same, you'd think they might be interchangeable, but they're not because the included thread angles [a measure of the 'pointiness' of the thread – Ed] are different. So, if you pick up a 7/16th Whitworth bolt, which is 14 TPI (thread per inch, a measure of the pitch), and use it instead of a 7/16th UNC – which is also 14 TPI – you'll get in a right mess when you tighten it because the included angle in a Whitworth is 55 degrees and the included angle in a UNC is 60 degrees.

There are also British Standard Cycle threads (BSCY), which are a hangover from bicycle manufacturing days. They're quite good because all their bolts are the same pitch – 26 TPI. Well, apart from two really small ones. There's also British Standard Brass, which you need to know about if you're rebuilding a carburettor. That's also 26 TPI, but has a different pitch angle so isn't interchangeable with BSCY.

Then there's British Standard Pipe threads and British Association threads. In my workshop over the course of a couple of days of spannering I'll encounter about 20 different thread types. Because I've used nuts and bolts all my life, I remember which are which, but I can see it might be confusing to some people.



No wonder it's so easy to screw up...

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» Think of these as sports-touring tyres with deep grooves to suit light off-roading and to give a suitably rugged look. With a dual-compound rear and single compound up front, they supply 'peg-scraping dry grip, are sure-footed in the wet, and ultra stable even on the most powerful adventure bike. Quieter at speed than some more knobbly dual-purpose tyres and as hard-wearing as a sports-touring tyre, too, plus a supple ride quality. Best of all, I'm talking the first-generation Tourance Next here, which can be picked up for a steal now the updated Next 2 has been released. And if you never plan to get the tyres on your large adventurer muddy, Metzeler's rather superb M9 RR Sportec (also £305/pair-ish) now comes in a 19in front. ***MN***

[Out & about]

Mother, is that you?

How much 'Gixer' is there in Suzuki's excellent **GSX-8R**? Mike Armitage pitches it against the iconic **GSX-R750** and teeters around Cadwell Park to find out

In his head he's Chris Walker

It's a GSX-R for modern roads and riders. At least that's what I've convinced myself and what spills out my mouth when asked what our long-term test Suzuki GSX-8R is like. The new-this-year parallel twin has entertaining punch, nimble handling, and a riding position with just enough plugged-in-ness. As last month's group test discovered, it's a cracking sporty road bike.

Reality is that the 8R is a world away from the GSX-Rs that defined sporting Suzukis from the middle of the 1980s onwards. Of course it is. This is obvious when parked next to the 1998 GSX-R750 SRAD that's in my garage. The older bike makes an extra 40bhp and is nearly 10kg lighter. It has sharper steering geometry, fully adjustable suspension, a stubby wheelbase, and a bum-up riding stance that shoves your nose against the sky-high numbers on its tacho. Sportsbike design has altered drastically – about the only thing matching are the tyre sizes.

Today I'm riding them back to back at Cadwell Park to really see what difference being designed nearly 30 years apart makes when used with gusto. Propped together in the paddock the differences are striking, the new bike clearly slimmer. Looks lighter in its Metallic Matt Sword Silver, too, although I suspect Suzuki traditionalists may prefer the Metallic Triton Blue option. Neither is as fine as the 750's classic blue and white, mind. (The modern paint names aren't a patch on the older bike's option of Candy Koran Orange with Pearl Novelty Blue either, although given what Suzuki's finish was like back then there's no guarantee how long it took for that blue to wear off).

It's a while since I've ridden a revvy, focused sportsbike on a track, so need a few laps to get used to keeping the tacho needle near the red bit and craning my neck over the kerbs. But once up to speed the 750 is glorious. Its 118bhp inline-four engine revels in being worked hard and the chassis feels super-happy over on its side, with lots of in-your-hands feedback. It encourages a different technique to modern race-reps, feeling happy for you to shove bumcakes into the breeze and thrust it down into turns. Just like how modern racers don't.

Compared to the short, stocky, low-barred 750, the GSX-8R feels like a commuter. The handlebars are high and close, their position exaggerated by a lower seat and footpegs. Hanging off in corners feels odd. The shorter rev range of the 75bhp twin has me accidentally colliding into the rev limiter, and the lack of top-end rush makes it feel breathless.

But these sensations rapidly disappear, replaced with utter confidence. Go a gear higher, use the midrange, and the motor is way happier. The 8R's front end is superb, the strong brakes and plush-yet-supportive forks encouraging throw-it-in commitment. With leverage from the upright stance and neutral nimbleness, the slender chassis flicks through the tight turns into the Mountain and on through Hall Bends with utter ease and serious pace. It hasn't the laser-guided pace of the 750 through the endless Chris Curve right-hander, though, and it's not long before the footpegs start dragging. Fun, yes. But limiting.

If you're a trackday fiend who spends weekends making themselves dizzy, the 750 is clearly superior. More speed and excitement, greater lean angle and corner speed, additional potential to nibble into. But for that once-a-year outing to a favourite circuit, the GSX-8R makes it easier to get up to speed and into the groove. Its limitations – mainly lean angle and corner speed, maybe also being a tad wheezy among lairy 1000cc superbikes – only really become apparent later in the day. About the same time post-lunch concentration starts to waver. At which point it's a far more comfortable, flexible, usable road bike for the trudge home.

Is there some DNA of the GSX-R hiding in the twin? Yes. I accept that they feel as different as the specs suggest, but it happily soaks up ham-fisted trackday (ab)use and the front end is glorious. And there's one way in which they're identical – price. The new GSX-8R costs £8999, which is exactly what my SRAD cost back in 1998. Apply inflation, and that'd be almost £17k in today's money. **MA**

Wheel to wheel

	1998 GSX-R750	2024 GSX-8R
Price	£8999 (£16,950 today)	£8999
Engine	749cc 16v inline four	776cc 8v parallel twin
Power (tested)	118bhp @ 12,000rpm	75bhp @ 8200rpm
Torque (tested)	56 lb.ft @ 9750rpm	54 lb.ft @ 5400rpm
Kerb weight	196kg	205kg
Rake/trail	24°/96mm	25°/104mm
Wheelbase	1395mm	1465mm
Seat height	830mm	810mm

PICS: JAMIE MORRIS

‘The 8R’s front end encourages late-brake silliness and throw-it-in commitment’

Slim 8R twin makes SRAD four look chubby

Uprightness gives ace low-speed flickability

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[**Racing**]

'Our best season yet'

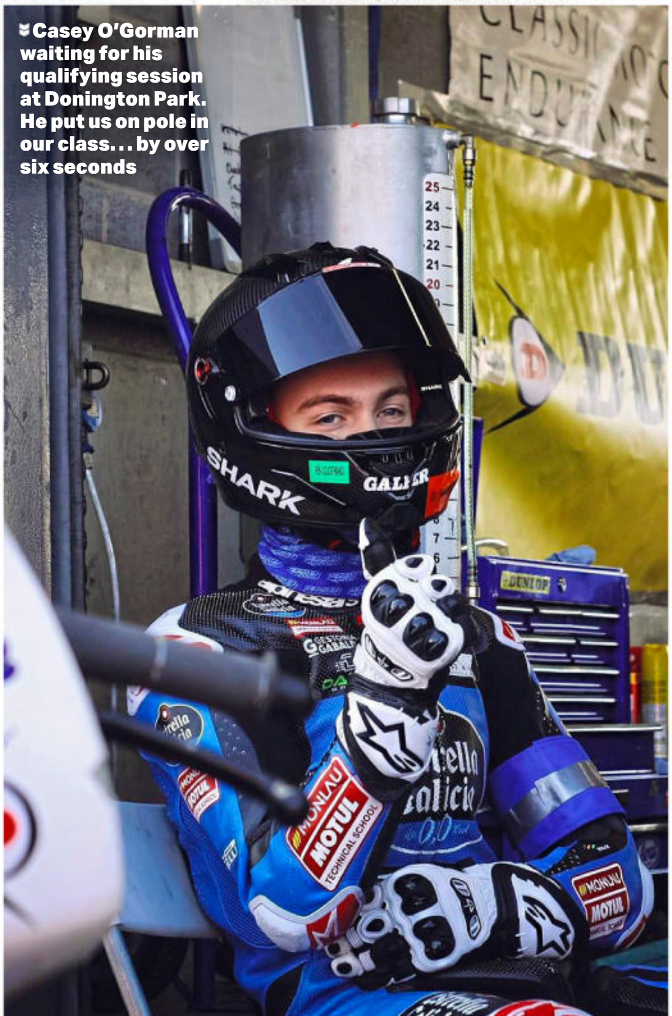
It may have ended with the wrong sort of bang, but Team Bike's 2024 season has been a corker. Team gaffer **Ian Martin** reports from the final two rounds

This has been Team Bike's best season yet with our Honda VFR750R RC30. Racing in the Europe Endurance Classic championship, we celebrated a win at the four-hour event at Paul Ricard in May and another at Pau in July. And in September we finished second in the Bol d'Or Classic.

There was every chance we might win the title at the final round at Donington Park in October. Casey O'Gorman, a front runner in the FIM JuniorGP series, put us on pole for our class. Unfortunately, the engine went bang and we missed the championship by seven points. It was a shame not to finish the final race in front of our home crowd, but if you had offered me second overall before the season started I would have jumped at it.

A huge thanks to all the team and our sponsors for their hard work and support throughout the year. We're already planning and looking forward to next season, with a new engine in development.

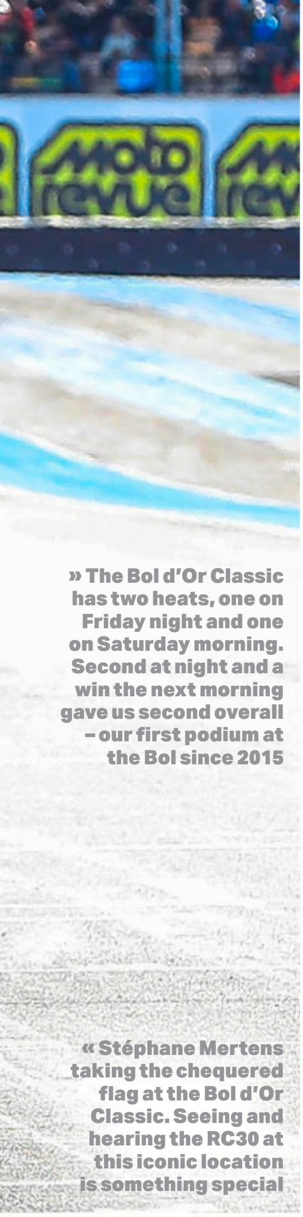
> 'We're already looking forward to next season'



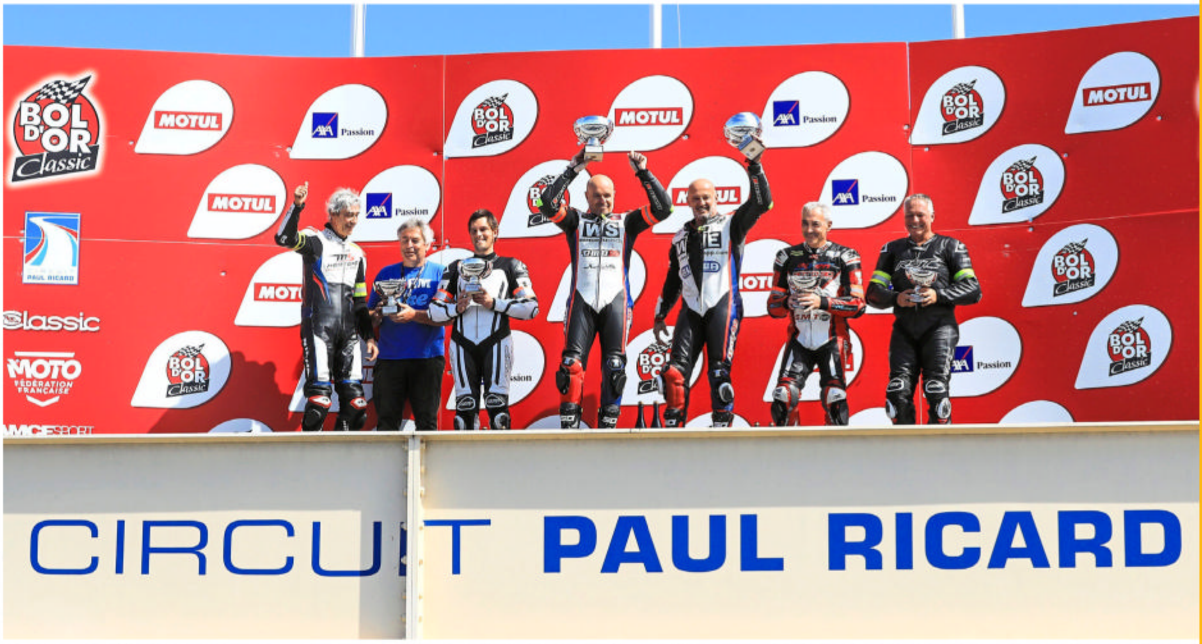
Casey O'Gorman waiting for his qualifying session at Donington Park. He put us on pole in our class… by over six seconds

The team have been flawless all season. It's a real pleasure to see them working together so well – it's what endurance racing is all about

Casey O'Gorman
Dan Burnham
Lancelot Unissart
sracing.co.uk



« Stéphane Mertens taking the chequered flag at the Bol d'Or Classic. Seeing and hearing the RC30 at this iconic location is something special


BOL D'OR Classic
MOTUL
AXA Passion
PAUL RICARD
Classic
MOTO FÉDÉRATION FRANÇAISE
CIRCUIT PAUL RICARD

» The Bol d'Or Classic has two heats, one on Friday night and one on Saturday morning. Second at night and a win the next morning gave us second overall – our first podium at the Bol since 2015

▲ After 10 years of racing at the Bol with number 8, the organisers gave it to a French team – it felt satisfying to be showing them the way round

▲ Casey O'Gorman at Donington. He was in the top ten of No Limits endurance against all the modern 1000s

▼ Lancelot Unissart, me, and Stéphane Mertens. They're a great rider pairing, both putting in their fastest laps at the end of sessions

TEAM bike
CLASSIC MOTORCYCLE ENDURANCE RACING
DUNLOP
SUZUKI

▼ Sharing the garage with British endurance legends Phase One. It was great to catch up with them – we first raced them in 1985...

« I genuinely feel very privileged to have such quality riders on my bikes

▼ Stéphane Mertens leading the Saturday morning race at the Bol. 65 years old, still as keen as ever, and did the second fastest lap overall. What a legend

PIC: BAUER

[Ahead of its time]

1991 Yamaha TDM850

Innovative, bold and unprecedented, the twin-cylinder medley of trailie and sportsbike was perhaps the ultimate UJM – and much ground was broken

You'd have good grounds for thinking Yamaha might have looked at the lukecold reception to the TDR250 in 1988 and wondered (hard) about the prospects for the TDM850. The two-stroke TDR bombed. Yes, love is all around it now. Yet to orchestrate a take-two for a four-stroke equivalent in 1991 – in the shadows of its lightweight forerunner's demise and departure in 1993 – was either flawed product planning, tungsten-tipped foolhardiness, or absolute belief in the ineluctable logic of a simple, compact twin.

Yamaha's 'Ultimate Dual' legend was put aside for the TDM; this pure road tool boasted nothing more than 'Twin 850'. Yet its engine architecture and chassis inform many of today's most popular bikes. Every mainstream Japanese manufacturer has a parallel in its roster.

Perhaps the TDM was already on the model release sheet when the XTZ750 Super Ténéré debuted in 1989. Not much was made of its stacked gearbox, piggyback clutch and compact engine at the time, nor was the later TDM (sharing the same engine datum points) lauded for what later appeared to some fanfare in the 1998 YZF-R1. Yamaha were first to it. And way back.

The TDM was a sit-up-and-beg road bike. Now it might be classed a tall-rounder, a presentiment of what is now a staple. Mercifully, Yamaha were not only rethinking the ergonomics but cleverly rounding on the idea that a 360° or even a 180° crank phasing (as per many Hondas) on a twin lent an even and fairly dull soundtrack. They pioneered the 270° twin – sounds like a 90° V-twin (good), longer intervals between power pulses (better for traction), cheaper to manufacture, more compact engine. Nothing not to like. The revised TDM in 1996 employed a power unit with this arrangement, as did the TRX850 (space-framed sportsbike).

The 270° crankshaft is now the norm for most parallel-twin engines. So is the piggyback gearbox. Upright rides are all the rage. To employ so many significant advances in one largely unsung machine is faintly ridiculous, but that is so often the Yamaha way.

Around £2000 will get you a tidy 1996 and beyond TDM900. While this page of *Bike* is not earmarked as anything other than a celebration of ultra-forward-thinking and advanced engineering, it's almost impossible to stroll past what amounts to a steal for one of the most significant machines of the past 30 years.

It may not look a million bucks nor stir emotions like an RC30 or 916, but Yamaha knocked it out of the park with this bike. Honda NC750 or Africa Twin, BMW 800, Suzuki, KTM, you name it – this was the Genesis of the avalanche of hot twins with character and poke (okay, maybe not the NC750) we enjoy today. ***Mark Graham***

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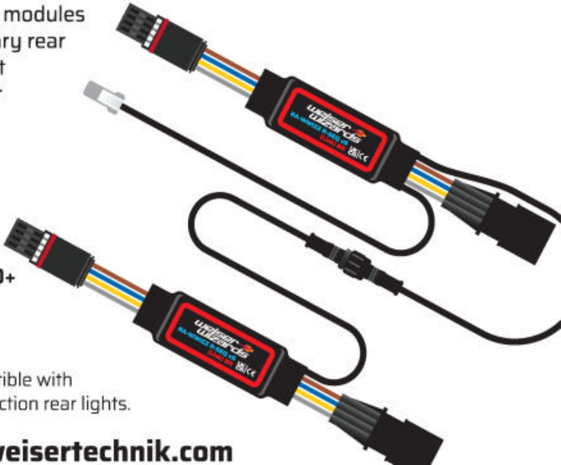
BMW M Series motorcycles 2023+
BMW F900 GS 2024+



*The current range of modules is not compatible with BMW North American specification multifunction rear lights.

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